

Why Do I Hear Boss Music?  
Conceptualising the Use of Mediated Audio in Tabletop Role-Playing Games  
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Blok 4 2018 – 2019  
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Word count: 4,869

### Abstract

There is a lack of scholarly literature regarding the use of mediated audio in tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs). While the use of mediated sound is not inherently part of tabletop role-playing games, the vast amount of overwhelmingly popular ambient sound and/or music compilations on platforms like YouTube and Spotify reveal the employment of these aural media by players during play.

Considering the lack of literature, we ought to turn to conceptualisations of the use of mediated sound in a comparable medium; video games. The media of video games and tabletop role-playing games are both interactive in nature, so many of the ideas and issues applicable to video games may apply to TRPGs. The media have significant differences as well, preventing the blind use of concepts from video game literature for TRPGs.

By turning to video game for conceptualisation of the use of mediated audio in that medium, and being conscious of the difference between the media of video games and TRPGs, these concepts are ‘translated’ such that they become applicable to the medium of tabletop role-playing games. These concepts provide a new framework for further research of sound in TRPGs.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Table of Contents	3
Introduction	4
Immersion into Environment	7
Shaping the Imagine Space through Designed Soundscapes	9
Music's Ambiguity and Mood Induction to Convey Emotion	12
Conclusion	15
References	16
Appendix: Examples of Compilations and Playlists	18
Glossary	19

## Introduction

On New Year's day 2019 I made it my New Year's resolution to learn how to play the popular tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) *Dungeons & Dragons: 5<sup>th</sup> Edition* (2014). The game had been on my pop-cultural conscious for a few years at that point, but I was never able to get into it as no one in my immediate social environment knew how to play the game. After reading through a few of the rule books and managing to join a few sessions of the game, I became quite invested in it. The medium's near limitless freedom of possibilities and narrative focussed gameplay proved to scratch that itch for interactive storytelling I felt was near impossible to get through video games. My growing investment in the game evoked a casual curiosity about the scholarly literature written about tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs), especially from the discipline of musicology. Having followed a couple of courses about musical intermediality and ludomusicology and being greatly invested in video games as a new art medium, I was aware of the growing body of research about music in video games.

After some initial research in the library and online I found myself surprised by the lack of scholarly literature on the use of music in tabletop role-playing games. This lack of literature may be attributed to TRPGs as a medium being non-electronic in nature. Games are played in a shared imagination, thus music is not immediately inherent to them, nor is the use of music referred to in any sort of written rules. After briefly researching on the internet it is however clear that music is widely employed by players of tabletop role-playing games. This mediated use of music in TRPGs is exemplified by the vast amount of overwhelmingly popular compilations and playlists on YouTube and Spotify. One can simply use the implemented search engines of these services to search for 'RPG music' or 'RPG ambience' and be presented with hours upon hours of ambient sound and/or music compilations and playlists, their titles indicating their intended purpose to be used in TRPGs (examples listed in the Appendix).

Considering the distinct lack of literature on the subject, where can we begin in conceptualising our understanding of the use of mediated audio in tabletop role-playing games? I suggest to turn to video game research as a starting point: both are interactive forms media, so many of the ideas and issues applicable to video games may apply to TRPGs as well.

There are a couple of significant differences between these two forms of media. Firstly, video games are digital in nature, TRPGs analogue in nature. This is a great difference between the two, as even digital tools to allow play of TRPGs over the internet

(e.g. <https://roll20.net/>) place the primary experience in the collective imagination. These digital tools stay close to the physical ‘pen-and-paper’ format of TRPGs by digitising the ‘bookkeeping’ aspect of these games, but having play still develop in the players’ imaginations. The game worlds in video games are represented digitally, those of TRPGs primarily mentally. Secondly, whereas videogames are a visually dominated medium, TRPGs lack nearly any form of visual representation, being almost entirely experienced through narration. TRPGs are therefore too different of a medium compared to video games to rely blindly on the research and concepts of the latter medium. To use the concepts and ideas proposed by scholars regarding music in video games in the medium of TRPGs, one has to translate these concepts to account for the difference between the two genres. It is this thesis’ goal to make the first attempts to translate concepts stemming from literature on video games, and answer the question of how we can conceptualise the use of mediated audio in tabletop role-playing games.

What are these concepts, translated? The body of this thesis consists of three main chapters, each addressing a different conceptualisation of the use of mediated audio in TRPGs. In the first chapter a more general concept will be discussed, applicable to various forms of mediated audio: immersion. Specifically, Bowman’s immersion into environment (2018) and Ermi and Mäyrä’s sensory immersion (2005) are vital to explore why players use mediated audio during play. The second chapter focuses on a distinct form of mediated audio: ambient sound compilations. The concepts central in this chapter are Schafer’s concept of soundscape, designed soundscapes (1980) and O’Keeffe’s contextualised game space (2011), and how these enrich the imagined world to the experience of the players by subconsciously shaping the imagined space. The final chapter directs its focus onto the use of music in play, explored through the lens of Collins’ concept of mood induction (2008) and Liljedahl’s properties of sound (2011). It explores the contrasts between language and music, and the use of music to fill shortcomings of language.

The decision to distinguish between ‘ambient sound’ and music throughout this thesis is a consequence of the titles given to the compilations and playlists that served as proof of the use of mediated audio in TRPGs in the first place. Producers of these playlists separate music and ambient sound: the prior adhering to the ‘conventional’ conception of music and the latter is closest to the concept of ‘designed soundscapes’ (Schafer 1980).

All of these conceptualisations of the use of audio in video games are critically explored in comparing the differences between the media of video games and TRPGs, and pointing out the consequences of these differences to the concepts. From these differences the

concepts are adapted such that they become useful in discussion of mediated audio in TRPGs. The differences are approached through personal experiences, as well as definitions of TRPGs from Zagal and Deterding's 'Definitions of "Role-Playing Games"' (2018).

To conclude, the three chapters are brought together to answer the thesis question. Through this thesis I wish to approach a conceptual understanding of the use of mediated audio in TRPGs. Ultimately, my goal is to provide a new framework for further research and analysis distinctly focussed on the use of sound in this medium.

### Immersion into Environment

An often-used concept in our understanding of the use of sounds and music in relation to other media is the idea of immersion. Immersion as a term is used metaphorically, referring to the physical immersion into liquid. When it comes to psychological immersion, it is as if one becomes enveloped by whatever medium they are immersed in (Bowman 2018, 379). In TRPGs players may feel themselves immersed in the game, the joint fantasy of a world other than reality, its rules and logic, and may lose themselves in this surrounding ocean of imagination. ‘Immersion’ may be a controversial concept (discussed in the next paragraph), it is nonetheless a valuable one: in and outside of scholarly discourse people describe a feeling of losing themselves in play, forgetting their surroundings due to being so invested in the game. The use of mediated audio reinforces this immersion, creating an aural border to signify the ‘magic circle’.

As mentioned, the concept of immersion is a controversial one. Most people (both in- and outside of scholarly discourse) are not in agreement of the exact definition of the term. When immersion is brought up in a discussion, people tend to not clearly define it. They will use the word ‘immersion’ when referring to differing conceptions of the idea, falling back on personal experience, and become defensive when a proposed description of immersion does not align with their own experiences and conceptions (Bowman 2018, 379). For clarity’s sake, whenever the concept of immersion is used throughout this thesis, it is used to connote ‘the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality [...] that takes over all our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus’ (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005, 40).

In an attempt to clarify the ambiguity surrounding the concept of immersion Bowman separates immersion in RPGs into six categories: immersion into activity, game, environment, narrative, character, and community (2018, 382). It is immersion into environment in which is particularly applicable as a general conceptualisation of the use of mediated audio in TRPGs. Immersion into environment is concerned with the immediate surroundings of a player, either in the game world or the physical world. These two may very well overlap in the case of Live Action Role Playing (LARP), where physical space is shaped using props and outfits to fit the game world space.

One of the forms of immersion into environment mentioned by Bowman is Ermi and Mäyrä’s sensory immersion. This form of environmental immersion is in their article linked to the audio-visual aspect of video games. A player is immersed into the sensory aspects of a game, the sounds and visuals of the video game repressing the sensory input of the physical

world around them (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005, 43). It may feel as if the player is surrounded in a bubble of audio-visual stimuli, keeping the player immersed into the game.

The visual representation of TRPGs is minimal, if any at all. As the game world of a TRPG is narrated by the game master (GM) to the players, all visuals are realised in their imagination. There is no visual representation of the game world in the physical world, so the visual aspect of Ermi and Mäyrä's sensory immersion is not present.

Then what about the aural aspect of sensory immersion? The aural aspect of this form of environmental immersion is not inherently present in TRPGs. However, as has been mentioned before, this does not mean it is not employed by players of these games. The playlists of mood-specific music compilations and location-related ambient sounds created for TRPGs show players use these mediated forms during play, reintroducing the aural aspect of sensory immersion into play. Generally, this sonic immersion in TRPGs is comparable to sonic immersion into video games. The sensory immersion envelops the player(s) in a bubble of sound, cutting them off from the sensory inputs of their surroundings.

There is an important difference between these media. TRPGs create a much larger bubble, one that envelops everyone playing. Whereas the sonic immersion bubble of video games directs the player's attention to the screen (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005), thus 'leaking' out of the game world into the physical one, the bubble created in TRPGs directs a player's attention to the other players inside of the bubble. The sonic bubble reinforces who is inside the 'magic circle' (Huizinga as referred to in Suter 2018) of play. Huizinga's concept of magic circle relates to the distinction between that what is inside the space of play, and everything that falls outside of it (Suter 2018). Whether this barrier between inside and outside is physical or imagined does not matter; what is important is that we conceive of a space inside which the rules of play are in effect. Thus, as I argue, the immersive aural bubble creates a sonic barrier between those playing (inside the magic circle) and those not playing (outside the magic circle).

Immersion into environment, specifically sensory immersion, is therefore vital to our understanding of the use various forms of mediated audio in tabletop role-playing game play. Because TRPGs lack a visual representation of a game's world, the mediated use of aural forms of media helps create the immersion into environment. The immersive bubble of sound reinforces the magic circle with a sonic barrier, separating the space inside which the players abide to the rules of play from the physical world outside.



### Shaping the Imagined Space through Designed Soundscapes

What about ambient sounds in particular? What concept could be applied to the use of ambient sound in tabletop roleplaying games? When one turns to literature on video games for concepts proposed in that field one finds O’Keeffe’s conception of designed soundscape as contextualising game space. Soundscape designers create sonic representations of the digital world, generally as an added layer of sensory immersion (O’Keeffe 2011). Due to visual bias this sonic representation is placed lower in hierarchy to the dominating role of our visual senses in perceiving and experiencing video games (Liljedahl 2011).

Before continuing with O’Keeffe’s concept of contextualising game space, it is important to first understand the concept of ‘soundscape’, designed soundscapes, and their importance to contextualising game space. ‘Soundscape’ as a concept was coined by R. Murray Schafer in *The New Soundscape* (1968). The term is a portmanteau of the words ‘sound’ and ‘landscape’ and is a perfect reflection of its essence: a landscape portrayed by sound. Everything around us produces sound: the birds whistle, the wind rustles the leaves of a tree, the flow of water creates a different sound depending on whether it is moving in waves like an ocean or rushing like a waterfall. The landscape around us produces sound, and depending on the context (storm or breeze, creek or ocean) it produces different key sounds (Schafer 1980). Sounds produced by our environment are part of our sensory experience of this surrounding environment. Sound shapes our understanding of space, as we contextualise sound to a source of origin (O’Keeffe 2011, 46). We may not be able to see the pigeon in the midst of a tree’s leaves, but its cooing does signify its presence. By contextualising all the sounds around us, we are able to construct a landscape from the sounds we hear. Different landscapes (e.g. rural, forested, urban landscapes) have different soundscape profiles (Schafer 1980). By linking the sounds, we hear to our contextual understanding of their location, as well as our memory of various different soundscapes experienced before, the aural senses help us place sounds into a spatial contextual understanding.

An important idea presented by Schafer is that of designed soundscapes. Schafer proposed the theories of designing soundscapes in an attempt to bring awareness to and combat what he saw as increasing noise pollution within contemporary soundscapes caused by technological advances (Schafer 1980). By designing a soundscape, a ‘soundscape composer’ is able to play to our aural senses, shaping a spatial landscape through our aural contextualisation. In Schafer’s writing it was the task of such a composer to return to a more ‘natural’ soundscape of the physical world (1980). For video games a ‘soundscape composer’ designs the worldly sounds of the digital world. For the medium of TRPGs it is the creator of

the compilation/playlist that is the ‘composer’. It is this design of soundscapes that is foundational to O’Keeffe’s contextual game space.

As O’Keeffe argues, it is not just the visual aspect that conveys the spatiality of the virtual game world; the aural aspect is just as important in creating a convincing virtual world (O’Keeffe 2011). In three-dimensional video games players observe a different world, visually displayed on screen. A game’s virtual world is not just realised through visual representation, it is also important that the aural representation is realised convincingly, especially in games simulating the physical world, e.g. first-person shooter (FPS) games. In these games, sonic directionality conveys the spatial locations of enemies and allies, but also implies other actions occurring in the game’s world, e.g. sounds of jets flying over in *Battlefield V* (EA Dice 2018).

How do designed soundscapes and contextualised game space relate to tabletop role-playing games? As has been stated before, TRPGs lack a visual representation of the game world. The world is shaped in the players’ imagination through narration by players and the GM. However, it would be impossible to describe every miniscule detail and sound the players should imagine in the game space. This is where a DM might choose to use a compilation of location-specific ambient sounds to have some control over the sounds that are diegetically present in the imagined world. These location-specific compilations are designed soundscapes of the location categories they are aiming to convey through sound, their intended soundscape reflected in their titles: e.g. ‘D&D Ambience - Town Square Daytime’<sup>1</sup> and ‘RPG/D&D Ambience – Mysterious Jungle’.<sup>2</sup>

I will briefly analyse the latter example in more detail, describing the key sounds, and the intended use of the creator. The description of this video reads: ‘Here’s another ambience for your RPG Sessions or your projects, a jungle ambience with tons of animal sounds, some rain and a few other sounds.’ The title and description both describe the intended soundscape depicted in the video: a jungle. Listening to the audio reveals just that: a mixture of crickets and other insects, the songs and sounds of a plethora of birds, and every few minutes the sound of raindrops hitting leaves. The insects and songs may or may not be described by a DM when used, but in using this designed soundscape it is through audio implied that they are there. The sounds become location-specific ‘background’ sound, sounds we subconsciously filter, yet contextualise to our (imagined) environment.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘D&D Ambience – Town Square Daytime,’ YouTube video, 2:55:20, “Sword Coast Soundscapes,” September 21, 2016, <https://youtu.be/NeOg8iCFfTA>.

<sup>2</sup> ‘RPG/D&D Ambience – Mysterious Jungle | Immersive, Realistic, Wildlife,’ YouTube video, 1:00:01, “Michael Ghelfi,” February 9, 2019, <https://youtu.be/5Jzp5H4mQVE>.

By employing soundscapes like the one described above, a game master is able to control the sound they wish to be diegetically part of the imagined world, as well as aid players in the act of imagining the world. Humans contextualise soundscapes as sounds originating from spaces. This is done nearly subconsciously (Liljedahl 2011). We hear the quiet sound of rustling leaves swell and we nearly instantaneously relate it to a gust of wind. We recognise the distinct key sounds of the types of tree (tall, short, needles or leaves) and do not think about it for a moment as we get a contextual understanding of the sound (Schafer 1980). Designed soundscapes in TRPGs are used to evoke these subconscious associations, the contextualisation of space through sound, to shape the game's imagined world. Instead of actively imagining the sounds of the location in the game world, players have the sounds evoke the association of space around them passively. Sound becomes the framework upon which the imagined space is built. It is the physical representation of the world that cannot be represented visually.

The use of designed soundscapes is a fascinating way to shape the game space. Where O'Keeffe's contextualising of game space through sound was an aspect subservient to the visual representation of a game's world in video games, the contextualising of game space through sound becomes an active one in directing the imagination of game space in TRPGs. The designed soundscapes created for use during play still function to create a contextual understanding of the game space, in TRPGs it is however the only representable aspect of the game space. These designed soundscapes take an active role in shaping the world through subconscious associations.

### Music's Ambiguity and Mood Induction to Convey Emotion

So far, we have gone over sonic immersion as a general conception of the use of mediated audio, and the shaping of imagined space through designed soundscapes applicable to ambient sound compilations. But how can we conceptualise the use of music in tabletop role-playing games? What function can music satisfy in play? To answer this, we once again turn to writing about music in videogames. Karen Collins tackles various functions of audio in video games in her chapter 'Gameplay, Genre, and the Function of Game Audio' (2008). One of these functions is the concept of mood induction: video game creators using music to evoke emotion in the player.

Before explaining mood induction, we first look at the distinct properties of sound, as described by Mats Liljedahl in 'Sound for Fantasy and Freedom' (2011). This article looks at the use of sound and music in video games, with these being subordinate to the use of visuals in video games (the prior always serving the latter) to the extent that music can be removed entirely without substantially effecting the game play. In arguing for more games where music is intrinsic to the gameplay, Liljedahl describes the properties of sound and the possibilities these properties provide for game design. Of the described properties there are two of relevance for this chapter: the ambiguity of sound and the ability of sound to affect us subconsciously.

The ambiguity of sound is placed in contrast to the concreteness of language. Compared to music, language is concrete, its meaning generally unambiguous and it conveys information more clearly. One can read or hear a statement and concisely distil its information so most people would be in agreement of its meaning. In contrast, music is ambiguous, its meaning convoluted and unclear. Different people hearing the same bit of music may have entirely different conclusions regarding its meaning. It is this ambiguity that leaves room for interpretation. Because music does not concretely state meaning like language does, it leaves room for our imagination to interpret its meaning. In the case of videogames, music requires the player to become emotionally invested into the game and to understand its and the music's meaning (Liljedahl 2011, 30).

The ability of sound to affect us subconsciously has already been explored in the previous chapter, through the lens of subconscious interpretation of sound to shape the imagined space. Music affects us differently. Music can portray emotion and induce emotions in us. Most people are arguably capable of distinguishing the 'less complex' emotions (e.g. happiness or sadness, in the clichéd Western music tradition portrayed through major and minor keys respectively) portrayed by a piece of music. When placed in context of a game's

narrative or plot its ambiguity lessens, and the emotion is not just portrayed, it is induced (Liljedahl 2011, 33).

Now I will return to Collins' concept of mood induction, or using music to affect us emotionally. In the context of video games this is linked to the interactivity of the player, having distinct intended emotions that are triggered by a player's actions in the game. The music heightens the emotion players already feel in their interaction with the game, such as losing a companion non-player character (NPC) or completing a boss fight. The music is used as a form of immersion into narrative atop the immersion into game of the gameplay and the aforementioned immersion into environment (Bowman 2018). The music creates a more complex experience, making the emotion felt through play nuanced or portraying emotions in accordance to the gameplay experience (Collins 2008).

Just like ambient sound, music becomes more autonomous in function in TRPGs. Music is ambiguous and evokes emotion in us, in contrast to language's concrete meanings which convey the intended mood unambiguously. While language tells us which mood was intended without us necessarily feeling the intended mood, music makes us feel the intended mood without telling us. This contrast between language and music is crucial in understanding the use of music in TRPGs. Tabletop role-playing games are played almost entirely through language, as the game world develops through narration: the GM describes a situation, the players respond, and the GM describes the consequences of the players' decision. Language is integral to the playing experience of TRPGs. However, the concrete meaning of language makes it difficult to convey emotion to the players. Because language is so literal in its meaning, the complex and ambiguous meaning of music is used to fill in the shortcomings of language. To circumvent the issue of conveying emotion (mood) to the players, a GM may therefore use music to induce the intended mood for any particular moment of play. Examples of such intended moods are once again reflected in the titles of the music compilations, e.g. 'RPG Playlist – Peaceful/Travel Music'<sup>3</sup> or 'd&d Battle music'.<sup>4</sup>

Once more I will give a brief analysis of one of these compilations as an example. The video 'RPG Playlist – Peaceful/Travel Music' conveys through its title the intended mood portrayed in music chosen: quiet, peaceful music, intended to be used during moments of travel within the game's narrative. Its description does not state any intention, instead listing all the songs used in the compilation. The choice of music reveals all songs to be

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<sup>3</sup> "RPG Playlist – Peaceful/Travel Music," YouTube video, 57:56, "Skooma Scamp," June 27, 2016, <https://youtu.be/A8qMyBWZNw0>.

<sup>4</sup> "d&d Battle music," YouTube video, 52:25, "ChayChay Stenson," January 21, 2017, <https://youtu.be/w0sUw735gRw>.

chosen from various digital RPGs: *Pillars of Eternity* (Obsidian Entertainment 2015), *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios 2011), and *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment 2004) to name but a few. This shows that, not only is the function of music in TRPGs and video games similar, TRPG players turn to the music from video games to achieve a similar effect. The remediation of music from video games in TRPGs might be a fruitful future research subject, it is however outside the scope of this thesis.

The use of music in TRPGs is as temporally uncertain as video games, which can be attributed to the inherent interactive nature of both of these media. So, while players of TRPGs use music to fill the emotive shortcomings of language and video games use music to create a more complex experience of gameplay, the way TRPG players employ music is very comparable to video games. They have to adapt to the change of mood stemming from interactivity of play, arguably accounting for an even wider array of moods due to the openness of possibilities in TRPGs compared to video games. This reveals the flexibility players have being in control of the music to convey mood. Because the music in video games is predetermined, it cannot account for accidental occurrences in play. Accidental glitches in play that are hilarious to the player are not accounted for. Music in video games reveals itself to be only prescriptively mood inducing in such situations where mood and music are in contrast to one another. TRPG players have the freedom to use it both prescriptively, in functionality similar to video games, as well as adaptively/descriptively, reflecting the mood and situations occurring from the decisions made by players.

The ambiguity of music and (derived from this ambiguity) its ability to convey and induce emotion complements the restrictions of language to do the same. Music can be employed by players to induce an intended feeling in play, comparable to the function of music in video games. TRPGs are more flexible than video games, as they are not only bound to the prescriptive quality of predetermined music, but are able to adapt and use music reflecting the mood arising from play, becoming descriptive rather than prescriptive in nature. Although the reason music is used in TRPGs is of a different nature to that of video games, the comparable use of music in both media makes mood induction a powerful concept to think about music in TRPGs.

## Conclusion

To conclude, let us return to the question central to this thesis, and reflect on the concepts explored in each chapter. How can we conceptualise the use mediated audio in tabletop role-playing games?

As a general conception of the function of various forms of mediated audio we can use Bowman's concept of immersion into environment and Ermi and Mäyrä's concept of sensory immersion. Because TRPGs lack the visual representation of a game world (compared to video games), the sound becomes more autonomous in its function of creating a sensory immersive bubble. This sonic bubble creates an aural barrier, signifying the magic circle, the space within which the players are partaking in the rules of the game.

For concepts focussed on the use of ambient sound we can use Schafer's ideas of designed soundscapes and O'Keeffe's idea of contextualising game space. The lack of visuals allows for sound to become an autonomous influence in shaping the space imagined, actively playing with our subconscious contextualisation of soundscapes to shape our imagination. Its role becomes foreground to the shaping of the world, a framework upon which the world is built, compared to only confirming the visual representation of a game world in video games.

The concept we can use in understanding the function of music in TRPGs is Collins' mood induction, possible because of music's properties of ambiguity and conveying emotion described by Liljedahl. The ambiguous meaning of music allows it to convey emotions, which are difficult to convey through the concrete meaning of language. The use of music in TRPGs is herein comparable to video games, albeit for different reasons. TRPG players also have more flexibility to adapt the music used in any situation, giving the music used not just a prescriptive, but also a descriptive quality as a form of inducing mood.

This thesis looked at various concepts from the overwhelmingly more researched interactive medium of video games to find concepts about the function of soundscapes and music in this medium and adapt these concepts to the medium of tabletop role-playing games. It was made in a first attempt to explore this medium specifically from a musicological perspective. Although the concepts explored here may be small in scope, it provides a framework for future research of the function of sound in the medium of TRPGs, and hopefully brings attention to the lack of scholarly discourse surrounding this medium. The increasing popularity of tabletop role-playing games in mainstream culture should prove that it is valuable to start dedicating more scholarly thought and research to this medium, as it did with video games. Perhaps one day scholarly musicological research on this medium might become autonomous, no longer relying on adapted concepts from video games.

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Appendix: Examples of Compilations and Playlists

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## Glossary

- Game Master (GM):** The player running the game, judging the rules and deciding the outcome of the players' actions. They are the storytellers of the game, the narrator through whom the players experience the game world. Other names for the GM are: Dungeon Master (DM), referee, story teller, or narrator (Zagal and Deterding 2018).
- Live Action Role-Playing (LARP):** A form of RPGs where players embody their PCs. Players dress up and play with a group of people in a game world created in the physical one (Zagal and Deterding 2018).
- Non-Player Character (NPC):** Any character in the game world that is not a PC (see Player). Whereas players have control over a single PC, the GM has control over all NPCs the players encounter throughout the game.
- Player:** A person playing in a TRPG game. A special type of player is the GM, they are the one running the game in TRPGs. Players (excluding the GM) are each in control of a character in the game world, their Player Character (PC). A group of PCs form a party, a group that stick together throughout the unfolding of the narrative (Zagal & Deterding 2018). Players experience the game world through their PCs' perspective.
- Tabletop Role-Playing Games (TRPGs):** one of the earliest forms of role-playing games and generally considered to be the ancestor to most other forms of RPGs. *Dungeons & Dragons* (Tactical Studies Rules 1974) is attributed as being the originator of the genre. Since the release of *Dungeons & Dragons* the genre has developed many different games, varying in game mechanics and focus on narrative storytelling. TRPGs are played with one GM and a varying number of players (generally between 2-6 players). The game is played through narrative: the GM describes a situation and asks what the players would like to do. Then the players describe how they would like to respond, and roll dice (commonly a twenty-sided die) to determine the outcome. The GM decides the outcome of their actions, taking the results of the dice into account. This loop is repeated throughout a play session (Zagal and Deterding 2018).