

"I want to be a big star"

Music simulation machines fulfill fantasies, deliver a realistic hands-on experience, and foster freedom of musical expression.

What young person in the world today hasn't grown up wanting to be a rock star or hip-hop rapper? Images of confident and cocky posturing musicians and singers are everywhere, from music videos to the covers of magazines, encouraging the big star dreams of young people. And while most of those dreams will never come true, a handful of coin-op companies are providing an outlet for game players' musical aspirations. Welcome to the world of music simulation games.

Since 1997, when Konami first introduced Japan to a music simulation game entitled *Beatmania*, only a handful of manufacturers have released product in the relatively new genre. The front runner is still Konami, whose line of music simulators includes *Dance Dance Revolution*, *Guitar Freaks*, *Pop'n Music*, and *Hiphopmania Complete Mix*.

In addition, Devecka Enterprises manufactures a drumming simulator that features a full-scale, studio-sound quality electronic drum and that challenges players to accompany their favorite popular songs. Would-be drummers sit enclosed in a small room surrounded by hi-fidelity speakers while they match beats with songs from a variety of genres.

Meanwhile, Namco is currently developing its own music simulation game, *Quest for Fame*, which was showcased in a prototype form at the recent IAAPA show and may again be shown at the upcoming ASI show. *Quest for Fame's* dual play feature, wherein two players can play at once (one on the drums and one on the guitar), make it a promising new release in the music simulation category.

Jim McCormick



Amuse World's Ez 2 DJ

Another music simulation game manufacturer, Amuse World, has shown its *Ez 2 Dj* unit at recent United States trade shows. The unit features turntables, buttons, and pedal controls, as well a large screen monitor, to recreate the disk jockey mixing experience for players. Also, Zax Amusements in Australia is offering *Beat Player 2000*, calling it a "next generation kit type music game," which can be fitted to any JAMMA cabinet and comes complete with PCB, high performance speakers and amplifier, top header, full control panel, and all wiring required. *Beat Player 2000* also features turntable and button controls.

Amid all the controversy surrounding the future of violent video games, many operators have their eyes open for forms of entertainment that feature non-violent content. One of the most notable features of musical amusements is that they offer operators a much-needed selection of non-violent and educational entertainment.

"Right now for the type of climate



we're in, music simulation games are the politically correct games," said John Bailon of Southern Hills Golf Land, a family entertainment center containing a 70-game arcade plus a two-course miniature golf course in Stanton, Calif. "There's no violence, it's not a gun game and it's not a fighting game. There is a competitive nature to the game, but it is fun. It's not a serious cutthroat type of game. It's been a welcome change in terms of all the gun games and fighting games. This is a new genre that is somewhat untapped, and Konami definitely has the stronghold on it right now."

The music simulator is a financially and socially promising new game format for operators to explore. *Play Meter* spoke with the two manufacturers mentioned above, as well as operators using their games, about the simulators' unique features and drawing power.

Emblematic of the growing popularity and ingenuity of music simulation games is the fact that Konami's Dance Dance Revolution was awarded the 1999 International Association of Amusement Parks & Attractions (IAAPA) Convention first place prize in the category of Best New Product: Coin-Operated Arcade & Redemption Equipment. The award criteria included originality or uniqueness of product, quality of design, and benefit of the product to the buyer. Drumscape by Devecka was first introduced at the AMOA show in 1998.

KONAMI

Konami was one of over 1,200 exhibitors taking part in the IAAPA event, which drew over 29,000 people from all over the world. At the Konami booth, in addition to Dance Dance Revolution, Hiphopmania Complete Mix, Guitar Freaks, Fisherman's Bait: Marlin Challenge,

and Silent Scope were shown to attendees.

"Currently we have Dance Dance Revolution, Guitar Freaks, and Hiphopmania Complete Mix," Bailon said. "We also have the Dance Dance Revolution Solo, but that is just a test piece that will be returned."

Dance Dance Revolution makes players feel like they are in a disco and features hot pulsating dance music with a glittering light show. Players can dance with a partner or go solo on the "dance floor." If their skill levels get high enough, they can

look for



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hidden modes to dance to.

There are three modes of play available. "Easy" is a practice mode that lets players warm up slowly and get into the groove of the game, wherein they can miss some steps and still play to the end. "Normal" challenges players to pick up the pace and keep up with the steps to advance to the next song. "Hard" is an expert level for the pros and challenges players to perform complex footwork.

Once a player has selected his play level, he picks a song from a selection of hot dance hits. Players then step on the arrows (right, left, front, and back) on the dance floor in

front of the monitor. As they watch the monitor, they see arrows rising to the top of the screen.

As the arrows on the dance floor match up with the arrows at the top of the screen, players step on the corresponding panels and watch the screen carefully to determine which arrows to step on in time to the music.

Hiphopmania is the music simulation game that lets players be a DJ and their own mixmaster as they complete different songs using the five-key keyboard and turntable. Players press the keys and scratch with the turntable in time with the notes onscreen to make music and can select songs from the genres of hip hop, reggae, techno, and soul.

Once they have chosen a level, of which there are three, players choose a song within that level. Of particular note is the Internet ranking mode, in which players enter scores among all Hiphopmania/Beatmania players throughout the world.

There is a miniturntable and keyboard at the bottom of the screen. As the notes onscreen descend, watch for them to hit the timing bar, press the corresponding keys, and scratch with the turntable.

Timing is everything. If your rhythm is good, your "groove level" will be high, and you can go to the next stage. If your timing is off, your "groove level" will be low, and you will not make it to the next stage. After playing for awhile, try the DJ Battle, which will test your scratching skills.

Pop'n Music is a lighter variation of Hiphopmania and features nine large colored buttons on the control panel, and a monitor.

Players choose a level (beginner, normal, or expert) and an original song from a variety of genres, including pop, reggae, techno, rap, disco, and Latin.

After the song is selected, the screen will show nine colored "pop



GUITAR FREAKS

Konami's Guitar Freaks

notes" descending towards the timing bar. As in Hiphopmania, players watch the screen and hit the corresponding colored buttons in time with the music and the notes on the screen.

Guitar Freaks tests players' timing and sense of rhythm and features actual guitar controls. Rock, blues, heavy metal, and more music styles are available to play. Players put on a guitar and, using the three colored neck buttons (red, blue, and green), press and hold the corresponding color to that of the mark rising on the screen.

In addition, players must strum the picking lever when the marks hit the timing bar. When a guitar icon appears onscreen, players can point the guitar upright and jam for the "wailing bonus." As notes are played successfully, players build combos for extra points. Secret bonuses also appear occasionally.

While he said that players seem to range mostly between late teens and early 20s in age, Bailon praised the music simulation games particularly for their ability to draw the oft-absent female player to the arcade.

"Generally we have a very high Asian clientele here, and the players on the music games are predominately Asian," Bailon said. "Surprisingly, though, we have a high percentage of females that play all the music games, which brings an extra dimension to the table that we never thought would pop up on those games. To have that extra income from females is a big plus. We haven't seen a game

that had that much female interest in a long time, not since Pac-Man or any of the touch screen games."

However, Bailon said that he was cautious when first exploring the possibility of operating the music simulation games on account of American players' reticence to do anything physical in playing a game.

"We were monitoring how well the games did overseas, in terms of Japanese trade magazines, Internet reports, and Japanese Web sites, and we were well aware of how successful they were there," Bailon said. "But we were reluctant to try them out because we were aware that the American market is a lot more inhibited in terms of people performing or doing something physically to interact with the game. Surprisingly, once the players got over that, everything fell into place and everybody started playing them. It actually was cool to play the games.

"That's the problem with video games that require physical activity," Bailon continued. "A lot of the American players don't want to look silly doing it. But, in this instance, the good players actually make the game and themselves look good. What we have now are a bunch of exhibitionists. The girls like to watch the guys; the guys like to watch the girls."

Volume is a big part of the successful operation of music simulators. The games are audio-based and therefore operators must make sure the unit's volumes are set properly. Maintaining the proper game volume and keeping the game away from the noisier games in a location can be

the difference between success and failure.

At the time of this writing Golf Land had had Guitar Freaks for about four months and the Dance Dance Revolution and Hiphopmania for over nine months. "We have had to do absolutely zero maintenance," Bailon said. "We were kind of cringing on the amount of abuse the dance games get, particularly the tiles that players step on, but they have held up."

And, according to Bailon, his return on investment was quick. "Right now we're getting the cream of the crop on our investment. It was a quick return because initially we were the only location in the area that had the music simulation games, and now everybody else is jumping on the bandwagon. Things are slowing down somewhat, but we still get a lot of the good players here who challenge one another and bring in other players."

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DEVECKA

Devecka's Drumscape is an interactive drumming simulator in which players get to jam on real electronic drums along with their favorite song in a stage-like environment. Players can choose to jam on theme-based drum sets like steel drums or timbales. Other drumset choices generate guitar, keyboard, and vocal sounds.

Since Drumscape uses an actual high-tech drum set, musicians can use it as a practice room. Many drummers have no place to play, and



DRUMSCAPE

experienced drummers often excite the crowds. Like most other games, when it gets surrounded, everyone wants to play. As is the case with Konami's machines, players of Drumscape compete in front of each other, drawing interest to the game.

According to Devecka, celebrity drummers have offered to visit locations, perform, and sign autographs for a nominal fee. Over 10 different celebrity artists, from Mike Palmer of Garth Brooks' band to Bermuda Swartz of Weird Al Yankovic's band, support Devecka's efforts in bringing music to children.

Darin Pilcher, director of equipment at Namco Cybertainment, emphasized the value of Drumscape's uniqueness in bringing customer attention to his Cyberstation arcade in Cross Gate Mall in Albany, N.Y.

"We have it positioned near our



Devecka's Drumscape

Pilcher said that Drumscape, which draws primarily teenage players who are full of energy, had required almost no maintenance. "We haven't had to do hardly anything to it," he said. "Initially there

Coney Island Emporium location in Las Vegas, Nev., at the New York, New York Hotel.

"I like the game," Getlan said. "In some locations it does very well, with teenagers and young adults in particular. It requires some maintenance, and there are always upgrades to the computer, but I think that music simulation games in general are a good angle for operators. Even though playing the drums can be done at home, for the most part it's not. Parents don't want to hear their children drum in the house. With Drumscape the children have someplace to go where they can play all they want."

Jeff Condon of Grand Prix in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., reported, according to Devecka, that his initial skepticism vanished about musical amusements when massive crowds began to appear in front of his Drumscape and the earnings remained high even when the arcade average dropped. "Our machine paid itself off in under 25 weeks," Condon said. "I've had the game in this location for over 37 weeks, and it's produced in the top 15 out of over 800 games. Drumscape is a steady earner."

While the music simulation game is a new genre, the experiences of these operators, as well as the recent IAAPA award for Dance Dance Revolution, point to a bright future for the games. Let's see what song they'll play next! ▲

With Drumscape the children have someplace to go where they can play all they want.

storefront, and I think because of that we had a lot more people coming in, at least to take a look at it," Pilcher said. "Drumscape is a centerpiece of that location now. During Christmas time, our busier season in the malls and arcades, the revenue was looking really good. It has fallen a little bit from that period."

may have been a couple of set-up issues, but it had to do with questions of placement and not difficulty with the game itself."

Michael Getlan, of Amusement Consultants, received the first Drumscape game and now has several of Devecka's Drumscape units in venues from small arcades to his