

## Video Games and Rock n' Roll Collide - We've *\*All\** Been Dying For It to Happen, We Just Didn't Know It.

So you've heard about it, played it at a friend's house, or, if you're really lucky, you have it yourself. We're not talking about a Pool Table in the basement, we're talking about the a wave of Music Video Games that have crashed like a Tidal Wave over the home entertainment industry. Today, we're talking about Rock Band 2.

So, let's get to it. Like most people, I tried Rock Band 2 at a friend's house. I honestly had very low expectations about the game, and had even put off playing either Rock Band or Guitar Hero because I didn't think I'd like it. After playing the games at my brother-in-law's house, I saw the game from a completely different perspective. I actually liked playing the drums and guitar. It was a great social experience, playing with a group of people together. I enjoyed so much that I went home and ordered the Rock Band 2 Game Bundle online, for around \$190. Along with the game DVD itself, the Rock Band 2 Bundle comes with a set of drums, a guitar, and a microphone (available for XBOX 360, Wii, and PS3).

Now let me pause for a second. You've probably heard of the "Butterfly Effect," you know, where a small change can ripple through time to make big, long lasting changes. In my case, the Butterfly Effect started with a simple shipping delay. I bought the game online, and ended up getting the Game DVD before my instruments arrived. That left me with a daunting choice: 1) Wait until the instruments arrived, or 2) Gather up the courage to use the headset microphone that came with my 360 and play the game using *vocals only*. Now keep in mind, I hadn't sung *anywhere* since I was 6 years old. OK, every once in a while, if I was in my car, alone, I would belt out a few lyrics of a song that I particularly liked. I would turn the music WAY up, as high as it could go, so I wouldn't hear my own voice. I figured that way, even if I am signing horribly, I won't have to hear myself. In fact I was quite happy just to keep my car crooning to myself. I would bet a good number of your reading this right now might also be thinking the same thing. Of course there would have been no butterfly effect if I had waited for the instruments to arrive (they did come, two weeks later). So, after my wife and kids went to bed, I walked game in hand to the den, where I keep my Xbox 360. There, alone, with nobody watching, I put the disc in the drive, started the game, pretended I was in my car, and turned the volume up. I soon felt the first ripple of this Butterfly Effect

Now for all of the gaming I have done, I have always, always stayed from Karaoke. When it comes to singing, call me shy, insecure, self-aware, or just plain scared (a little of each really). I always said to myself "there is no way I would sing in front of a bunch of strangers." [aside: "Well, there was the time when I was 19, in the Bahamas, and they played that Men at Work song I really, really liked..... but there were no witnesses who could identify me, and I wasn't necessarily in the best state of mind to "self-asses" my performance."] I soon realized that Rock Band 2 is, without the instruments, basically Karaoke. The first song that I pick to sing was *The Eye of the Tiger*, I figured, that seems relatively easy. I knew the lyrics (doesn't everyone somehow?) so I gave it a

try. I picked the easiest level, and I didn't do very well, but wow, I was blown away, it was incredibly FUN. Fun in a way that I hadn't experienced since I had gotten my first Atari for Christmas fun. Fun like learning to ride a bicycle for the first time fun. Fun like the thrill of learning something brand new.

Still, even though it was fun, I didn't seem to be very *good* at it. Keep in mind that I had (and I mean this) zero confidence that I would ever be a good *singer*. At that point, I channeled my energies into being good *at the game*. Technically speaking, to be good on vocals in the game, you just need to sing on the beat like most Karaoke. You also need to sing on pitch, which is absent in most Karaoke. So, sing off beat or out of pitch, and you do pretty badly at the game. Fortunately, the game gives feedback in real time. If I was a little too high or too low, I could fix it. To be even more technical, I was getting biofeedback from the game that was necessary to control and match the appropriate pitch as I sang the song. Unexpectedly, in the privacy of my den, *I was learning to sing.....* from a video game.

The Butterfly Effect continued to grow, and I want to sing *more*. Next up, *Hungry Like the Wolf*, then *My Own Worst Enemy* (ironic, I know). Before I knew it I was taking on songs like *Man in the Box* and *Livin' on a Prayer*. Sure, I failed a few times, and in Rock Band 2 that translates to the audience booing you off the stage. More often, I did what I needed to get my voice on the beat and on pitch, and succeeded. The Developers at Harmonix even more surprises for me. As I got better, the virtual crowd started cheering for me. Eventually as I got better, the crowd started singing in chorus with me. I allowed a brief flight of fancy and thought to myself: "maybe I can really sing."

Fast forward to today. I now sing daily in front of my family and I don't shy away from singing in public. I know that I was never blessed with a beautiful, natural singing voice, and yes, there is a lot more to singing than just hitting the beat and matching pitch (breathing, pronunciation, resonance, range, etc...). Ultimately, the vocals on Rock Band 2 might not make you a good singer, but I can safely say that it can make you a *better* singer. And here is the big payoff if you are a parent: because I now sing, my family now sings, including my wife and both my daughters (6 and 3). We play Rock Band 2 together, as a family. We compete, we laugh, and we spend quality time together. Rock Band 2 was developed and engineered by Harmonix to give a family or groups of friends a quality, social experience. For me and my family, they delivered.

So, what is my advice to you? If you haven't played Rock Band (or Guitar Hero), try it, you'll like it. Try the guitar, try the drums, and most importantly, try singing. And *especially* for those of you who have never sung in front of others, you **HAVE** to try singing. There a whole new world that awaits you and it all starts with a ripple.

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