Chiptune Theme Park Transcript

[00:00:00] [Musical intro: Amusement Sparks Theme – Andrew Spohn]

ANDREW [00:00:12] Welcome to Amusement Parks, the theme park design show. I'm your host, Andrew Spohn. With me today is a very special guest, James York. How you doing today, sir?

JAMES [00:00:20] Very good. Thank you. Thanks for having me.

ANDREW [00:00:21] You've got this this huge online footprint of cool stuff that you've done. I don't even know what to, like, lead in with. But can you explain yourself a little bit and, like, you know what some of the cool accomplished was you've got going on are?

JAMES [00:00:34] My day job is I'm a language teacher at a university. So I... Well, basically, I teach English with boardgames and I teach English through game design and things like this. I'm very involved in language teaching with games. But another part of my online persona is 8 bit music and chip tune. So that's where we're going today, essentially.

ANDREW [00:00:57] Awesome. Yeah. I'm super excited about that. We're kind of taking a whole genre once again, but it's one that maybe has less specific known works that have visuals. So it's a little different like, I think this might be our first music based theme park: chiptune. So this is a genre of music that I personally really love as a lover of vintage video games. I love electronic music. Yeah. So I'm super down for this and I really like the work that you've done personally. So I think you're really good--a good guest to have on this episode. I'm stoked about it.

JAMES [00:01:34] Yes. So I actually record as cheapshot. And I have a record label, a chiptune record label called CheapBeats. So I'm very much in the chiptune scene. If you don't know about chip tunes, maybe this will be education for you guys that are listening.

ANDREW [00:01:48] I'm excited to be able to highlight and showcase some artists who do amazing work in a genre that's not appreciated very much by the sort of mainstream culture. How long have you been making chiptune music yourself?

JAMES [00:02:00] I've been making it since... uh let's think... About 2010, 2009. Since I came to Japan in 2005, I studied the language quite hard. And then after I got to a level of proficiency where I was happy, I went back into music because my B.A. is in music.

ANDREW [00:02:19] I didn't know that, that's awesome. What originally brought you to Japan? Just such a cool journey for so many people.

JAMES [00:02:25] It connects to the B.A.. So, well, I was actually my bachelor's degree in kind of music technology. I was like "well, I'm not going to get a job that easily." I was kind of floundering about in the UK. And so I thought, I'll just come for an adventure in Japan. And I've been here 14 years now.

ANDREW [00:02:42] Wow. That's fantastic. Very cool. So, yeah, your your record labels been going for, what, six years or is it longer than that now?

JAMES [00:02:50] Something like that. Yeah. 2012. 2013 maybe we started. So yeah. A long time. We have over 100 releases, so yeah.

ANDREW [00:02:57] That's so impressive. That's something that I've always been interested in his music production and record labels and that whole thing. So in college I did a few projects on one doing producing a record and one on starting a record label. It was like a nonprofit type thing, but things have changed so much even over the last like, you know, six or seven years in the world of digital publishing and music rights and music streaming and all that. Has that been like a crazy journey for you?

JAMES [00:03:23] Yes, I think there's a website called Bandcamp. You probably aware of it? That really changed things for net labels. It made it very easy to start a record label and get music out there. It's kind of a self publishing web site. They take 5 to 10 percent of any money that you make, but it's really easy to get in front of fans. And yeah, that's been really helpful. There's things like SoundCloud, which are just not very useful... but yeah, Bandcamp has been a big game changer. Definitely. And then with Spotify, it's pretty much a given that you have to have your records on Spotify now, but--

ANDREW [00:04:03] Right. But it's not a good source of income. Isn't it like you've got 100 plays to make a cent or something like that?

JAMES [00:04:09] It really isnt, I mean, I just got literally last weekend I downloaded my digital store kind of streaming revenue for all the releases that we have on on my record label. And it's like just maybe two or three that have made a little bit of cash. The rest are just like pennies. It's crazy.

ANDREW [00:04:29] Wow. And that's that's rough. But yeah, any of the listeners feel free to go to these releases and then just loop the albums and turn your speakers off. Haha.

JAMES [00:04:37] That's the best thing I can say. If you really like a scene or you really like the music, really that the artist, the best thing you can do is support them by just doing a one time purchase like a couple of dollars, three or four dollars. It's much better than whatever they'll make on Spotify.

ANDREW [00:04:51] Yeah, totally true. And it's different as far as like actual like physical performances for a lot of these artists whose... I mean, it's a really cool scene and seeing a live chip tune show is fantastic, but they don't have the--they don't draw the crowds in order to like justify going on a nationwide tour very often. But you do have some really interesting festivals, you know anything about those?

JAMES [00:05:14] Yeah, I run the biggest chip June event in in Japan. So yeah...

ANDREW [00:05:17] [Pretending to not know] Oh!

JAMES [00:05:20] Yes, Square Sounds Tokyo. It's a yearly event that we do out here where we have international chiptune artists and a large selection of national chiptune artists. Yeah, that's a big one in Japan. There's a couple in Europe. I mean the starter was 2006 with Blip Festival, which was run in New York, but that unfortunately died down after, I think, 2010, 2011, something like that.

ANDREW [00:05:44] Right. And they made a documentary about that.

JAMES [00:05:46] That's right, yeah, that was a big one in New York. But there's still little pockets of chiptune in the states. Seattle is actually blowing up right now. There's a there's

a couple of events happening over that way. I think L.A., there's gonna be an event happening again soon. And then Sheffield in the UK. There's an event happening in London. There's stuff happening, but yeah, it's it's kind of small. We've been doing Square Sounds now for, I think, about nine years in Tokyo. So and yeah, we're kind of in a groove. It's like this is how we do it every year. People know what to expect. So just having that kind of kind of standard. It really is quite helpful.

ANDREW [00:06:22] That's awesome. Just before we get into the actual theme park, I'm really curious, are your like students like just amazed by the stuff that you've done?

JAMES [00:06:30] So they don't really know about this side of my life.

ANDREW [00:06:32] You don't wear this hoodie to class everyday or anything? He's got like a cool like pixel/chiptune hoodie.

JAMES [00:06:39] I actually work at a science and tech university, so I have a couple of students occasionally go "Oh, I went to Square Sounds Tokyo." And I'll go "Oh, cool. I run that." And they're like "No way!" But because the genre is so small, it's only a couple of students that ever come up to me and ask me about music.

ANDREW [00:06:53] I feel like that's such a cool thing to have on your resumé and that you've been--had kind of an influence on multiple like parts of the scene over there, like I imagine you'd be like a star. I guess it is a pretty niche thing even in Japan, right?

JAMES [00:07:07] That's right. Yeah, for sure. Yeah.

ANDREW [00:07:09] Yeah. I guess the history of chip tune... I don't know of much originating from Japan. Of course, a lot of the hardware did, but it seemed like a lot of the originators were in the UK and then kind of some worldwide explosion started maybe in the U.S. or in Europe.

JAMES [00:07:24] I think the states, particularly the New York scene's, very instrumental in making it popular, that's for sure. But Japan... I think in Japan we have two styles of chiptuners. You have the people that do want to perform and go out and be a public face. But Japan in terms of its kind of social media presence, people are quite reserved and they're quite private. So you have this whole chiptune scene in Japan where they're making music, but they're not performers, whereas if you match in the states, people just want to perform. They want to go out there and perform.

ANDREW [00:07:59] So, yeah, that makes sense. And those are definitely different sides of the same fandom almost.

JAMES [00:08:05] See, Japan has always had this kind of mystique about it. So if you are if you are a kind of public chiptuner in Japan, you get a lot of followers, like particularly on our label, we have Scythe and "tuh-bah-kay-gow". These two artists that that they're very public and so they do get a lot of followers, which is which is nice.

ANDREW [00:08:22] Awesome, very cool. So should we start with an overview of what chiptune is just so that the audience, if they're not familiar, can get caught up a little bit? What makes Chip tune chipped him?

JAMES [00:08:33] The best way to describe chiptune for me is thinking of it as an an aesthetic rather than a genre of music. It is not a genre of music. Chiptune is just how you produce the music. So everybody's using the same sound chip to produce the genre of their choice. That is chiptune. So for example, I'll pick up a Game Boy and I have a cartridge in there and the cartridge will be triggering sounds from the Game Boy sound chip. That is chiptune. It means that you are triggering sounds from the chip inside this old computer, which means that you can pretty much make any genre of music. I can make a blues track. I can make a rock track. I can make pop, techno, dubstep, whatever you want. It's just the kind of sound palette that makes it chip tune.

ANDREW [00:09:20] That's fantastic. That's a great explanation. And it it seems like the the borders of it are kind of fuzzy, like there's some people who do what's called fakebit, but (which sounds a little derogatory). but where you use modern hardware to emulate or sample those earlier hardware sounds just in a more user friendly way.

JAMES [00:09:37] Yep. There's a whole dumpster fire flame war about what is chiptune.

ANDREW [00:09:43] Haha, but it it can include a lot of different things and you can add on a layer of playing like an actual guitar or playing drums or, you know, whatever physical instrument you add to it too. It just wouldn't meet the like most simple enclosed definition of what chiptune is.

JAMES [00:09:59] Well it would be the purest definition and the elitist definition. "If it's not made on an old computer, then it's not chiptune." I mean, that is the pure purist perspective. But yeah, you can have, you know, bands that play with the Super Nintendo or the Nintendo as a backing instrument that is basically chiptune as well. And then like you mentioned, fakebit, which is emulated chiptune. But of course, you can do things with fakebit, like you can emulate maybe four or five Game Boys all playing at the same time so you can get different different sounds out of it.

ANDREW [00:10:29] Right. It's just using a newer technology to leverage what it's capable of because that old hardware could barely--especially really old style Commodore 64, for example. You can't run much, you know, of a spectrum of sound through that thing at all. So it makes sense to leverage newer technology.

JAMES [00:10:49] But for the purist (I mean, I'm quite, quite a purist myself) for the purist to hear something that just sounds so cutting edge, so modern, coming out of these old machines you just like that is the draw. That is wow, I mean how did they do that? That that's the draw of this music genre.

ANDREW [00:11:05] What I think the beauty of something like this is, is seeing what someone's able to create with such a limited super tight restrictions. And it's not like you're going to find some shortcut or some hidden expanse of the technology. It's like the realm of possibility is well-known and well established and it's not going to get an update anytime soon. So you're using these these old pieces of technology and just squeezing more life and more art out of it, which is a really, really cool thing. It's a really interesting genre. And personally, I love the Game Boy related stuff because those are the the, you know, official chiptunes like from actual, you know, Nintendo cartridges that I grew up with, that I think that music is really good. So seeing someone kind of pay homage to that and use the same exact hardware, it's like, I don't know. It's such a cool, whimsical thing that uses nostalgia and leverages that and creates something totally new. Like, I'm just crazy about the genre.

JAMES [00:12:05] Yeah. I mean, we can we can talk about this all day. But I mean, but the the idea of chiptune is well is it is not video game music. That is something that people often make mistakes with. Yes, it could have been used for a game soundtrack, but chiptune is more of using this Game Boy to make modern music. That's my own perspective and that's the perspective that I tried to push, that we are separate from videogame music. We are not particularly interested in video games. We are making music with these old machines. That is chiptune for me.

ANDREW [00:12:38] And there are some some notable artists who may have started out as doing it more commercially for video games and then they've transitioned into the more--the chiptunes seen of the able to be more creative and not doing this just for a project of a videogame.

JAMES [00:12:50] Or even the other way round as well--Chip tuners then go on to make OSTs for game soundtracks. Yeah, they've got to make money.

ANDREW [00:12:58] Right, right, exactly.

[00:13:21] [Musical break: Memory Days - Scythe]

ANDREW [00:13:22] A theme park based on a classification of music--what a concept! Haha, you're the one who came up with this idea. What do you think? Should we--I mean, we have to make it something physical. It can't just be an auditory experience, right?

JAMES [00:13:34] That's right. Yeah, that's right. Let's start with a roller coaster, cause I guess that's a staple of a theme park.

ANDREW [00:13:40] Absolutely. That's what's gonna be on the T-shirts and stuff.

JAMES [00:13:43] So the roller coaster I thought of as an 8 bit wave table. So if you imagine... hmm, how can we describe this? Like if you imagine a sine wave, it's a very smooth like a roller coaster.

ANDREW [00:13:59] It's like a roller coaster, yeah. Classic up and down. Yeah. Curve.

JAMES [00:14:04] But with the old hardware, with the 8 bit hardware, it's not that smooth, right. It's not a smooth, lovely round sine wave. You've got like jagged edges and...

ANDREW [00:14:19] It's like pixels versus polygons, kind of. Like [with] polygons, you can replicate something pretty smooth but with pixels, especially lo fi pixels, you can not at all. So it's it's like a square... It's not even a real thing in math, that's very common at all, but basically just squares, right?

JAMES [00:14:35] Yeah. So if you imagine a staircase going up and then back down again, that is how... That is the definition. That is that's the kind of resolution that you get with 8 bit. So I thought it'd be kind of cool to have an 8 bit rollercoaster, which is incredibly painful.

[00:14:53] [Laughter]

JAMES [00:14:53] Because you'd go again up and down these stairs, yeah.

ANDREW [00:14:58] Just super bumpy haha.

JAMES [00:15:00] But then chiptune is also 16 bit you can have like the Game Boy Advance and the the Mega Drive and the Super Nintendo. They have a much smoother sound, if you like. So that they're double the resolution. So maybe you can have 16 bit parts of the rollercoaster that are not quite so jagged-y and not quite so painful.

ANDREW [00:15:20] Yeah. Another way we might want to take this metaphor like in another part of the park in a more mundane area, would be with an actual staircase where you have the big chunky stairs that are kind of an 8 bit sound, and maybe do one of those things that they've had these in various places in the world where each step you step on, (each stair you step on, I guess is a clear way to say that) plays a different note, like it's on a keyboard, like ascending or descending. But you can also do a higher fidelity one for like the handicap accessible ramp. It could be like a smooth spectrum of sound as you wheel up or down and or walk up or down it, whereas it's like clearly defined digital type sounds on the staircase.

JAMES [00:16:00] There we go, I like it. So how about all the staircases in the theme park make 8 bit sounds or something.

ANDREW [00:16:06] I love it. And you wouldn't have to just be a straight, like, scale. It could be like the instrument... It's called like a thumb piano, I forget the authentic name for it, but basically where all the notes sound good and they're all in the same key.

JAMES [00:16:18] Oh, okay, they're in a scale.

ANDREW [00:16:20] Yeah. So we could have different scales in different areas or it could play the first several notes of any famous song.

JAMES [00:16:27] Well I know I wanted to try and keep video games out of it as much as possible, but do you remember the Mario 64 where you go up the staircase of infinity?

ANDREW [00:16:35] Yes haha.

JAMES [00:16:36] It uses something called the shepherd's scale I believe, where it's overlapping... Basically it's overlapping octaves of sound that they become louder in the middle and then quiet as they go towards the end. [Music plays softly in the background] So it has this kind of weird property where it feels like it's an never ending going up kind of sound. So why don't we have that?

ANDREW [00:16:58] Wow, I love that. And that is such a powerful sound. Like that's that song is like maddening almost. Or like it puts you into like a trance or something. It's a really interesting.

[00:17:07] [Musical break: Love is Insecurable – chibi-tech]

JAMES [00:17:28] Anyway, so about about the roller coaster. I try to incorporate artists that fit particular rides. So for the roller coaster, because it goes up and down, maybe we can have kind of emotional chiptune that is, you know, triggered as you're going down. It's kind of like sad stuff and when you're going up if it's kind of happy stuff. So.

ANDREW [00:17:49] But no, that's cool. And you could even change it out with the seasons. You know, if you have a featured artist. Even if it changes every 15 minutes. You know, you could ride the roller coaster and hear one soundtrack kind of scored to it and it could have lights that light up and, you know, like a like a laser show or whatever, like choreograph to the music and then you can get back on the right again. And it's a different artist with different light show, but the same ride.

JAMES [00:18] There we go. I like it.

ANDREW [00:18] Dude, that's really cool. And I also love that you could... That this park, because it's music based, we can highlight the artists a lot. It's really cool. Not just about the hardware, you know, it's about the artistry and each specific musician as well.

JAMES [00:18] Yeah. I like that. I like that a lot.

[00:18:20] [Musical break: Focus - Chipzel].

JAMES [00:18:53] The next ride I have here is... I don't know what it's called. You know, it's... How can I describe it? It looks like a whirling hat. It looks like... It looks like...

ANDREW [00:19:04] It's almost like a coin like a quarter when it's almost flat.

JAMES [00:19:08] That's right. So it's spinning round horizontally. But then there's parts of it going up and down vertically like a wave. Like a whirling dervish kind of thing. So this ride, I imagined it like a hexagon kind of shape and thinking of a hexagon, I know that there's an artist from the U.K. called Chip Cell and she made a soundtrack for a game using a Game Boy. And the game is called Super Hexagon, where you are literally a hexagon spinning round. It got quite a critical acclaim this game.

ANDREW [00:19:42] I've heard it's super hard. It looks... When you watch someone play it, it's like, yeah, I get what they're doing. But then, yeah, supposedly I've actually played it, but it's like pretty much super difficult.

JAMES [00:19:54] I think you have to spin round the edge of the hexagon and then come back again and I don't know, I haven't played it too much myself.

ANDREW [00:19:59] It's like a labyrinth, almost like a ball maze kind of thing, but in 3D. It's like Welltris, but it's rotating. Oh man. Yeah. It looks really... It looks really cool and that's a really cool aesthetic for this too.

JAMES [00:20:11] So I thought that could be one of the rides. Yeah.

ANDREW [00:20:13] I love that. And then tying in with the artist once again, I also love the motion of those--of those rides has kind of a music like the pulsing rhythmic thing to it where it fits in time with music a lot. It's almost like a wobbly record on a record player or something.

JAMES [00:20:32] It is exactly like that. Yeah.

ANDREW [00:20:34] That's a really cool one. Is there another kind of coaster you had in mind for a specific artist?

JAMES [00:20:40] Not particularly, no. I just thought of having the roller coaster being the 8 bit thing, where it's kinda painful.

ANDREW [00:20:45] Haha I like that. And that's kind of fun. Like even if you don't want a subject everyone's spines to that kind of trauma, you could have like the the visuals next to them are really jagged and rugged during most of it, or maybe there's an 8 bit phase of it and then you cycle back around and go on a 16 bit area where it's not quite as jagged.

JAMES [00:20] Exactly, that was the idea. Yeah.

[00:20:53] [Musical break: Afterthought – albino ghost monkey]

JAMES [00:21:12] Then next. Pretty staple for a theme park is the haunted house. So again, using artist names, there's an artist called albino ghost monkey. So obviously having ghost in there. He could have some some kind of BGM going on. And then there's an artist from Japan called Scythe. So I thought of having swinging scythes going in and out inside the haunted house.

ANDREW [00:21:36] That's fantastic. And there's also the... I'm not sure if it's popular internationally, but there's a genre in the U.S. at least that's the Viking ship that just kind of swings back and forth like a pendulum. That would work for this as well, a giant scale scythe.

JAMES [00:21:52] Unfortunately, though, we couldn't have sides. Music is the BGM for the haunted house because he's super upbeat and happy.

ANDREW [00:21:58] Haha alright. It might be cool, though, if this giant scaled scythe is actually like chopping the haunted house in half. You know, there's a part where you have to like stop in your tour of the haunted house and then like a roller coaster car thing just like flies through the building.

JAMES [00:22:14] Well, maybe if it becomes too scary for you, then you could actually put some headphones on and listen to some side music and cheer yourself back up again.

ANDREW [00:22:21] I like that, there you go. And kind of the up and down like we were talking about, with the like emotion. Emotional roller coaster so to speak. Of yeah, the happy and the and the tension.

JAMES [00:22:33] That's it. Yeah, so that was the haunted house. And then there's an artist from Seattle area and his name is boaconstructor, which comes from obviously boa constrictor the snake. And I thought of having a snake, kind of like a roller coaster, not a roller coaster, a helter skelter. Like a slide that goes down just from his name. And he makes these it's very kind of aggressive dubsteppy trap kind of music. So that could be quite interesting in the background of the helter skelter.

[00:22:42] [Music under conversation: I DON'T NEED YOU - boaconstructor].

ANDREW [00:23:06] Yeah. That's really cool. I like the idea of a slide too, even doing similar technology to what we're talking about with the stairs where maybe the faster you go down, the faster it plays the song or something like you know. It measures your your BPM as you pass between these two laser points. And it's like, okay, we're playing this

song with this person because they're... This song is gonna be the exact right BPMs for them to be riding around as the ride's pulsing to this song or whatever.

JAMES [00:23:31] And again, we could perhaps have the bumpy parts with the 8 bit kind of style.

ANDREW [00:23:36] That's really cool. Or like kind of a dubstep... Like those are like where the big like wobbly parts are. Oh man! Well, this is such a like bizarre idea, but it's it's coming to fruition a lot more easily than I even expected. It's awesome. I could tell you've done your homework.

JAMES [00:23:51] I definitely thought about this, I was on my commute to work, and I was like "Yeah, how can we make a chiptune theme park?" So then I thought, "well, you're gonna have to have an arcade because a lot of chiptune it's made on old game machines.".

JAMES [00:24:04] So why don't we have an arcade with costly games from those machines? Maybe you've got some Game Boys setup, maybe you've got some Mega Drives or whatever. So maybe you can listen to the music and play the games. So the arcade would have to be, you know, classic games, essentially.

ANDREW [00:24:21] That's fantastic. And I like the getting the park guest familiar with the hardware as well. Just for someone who maybe has heard this music or, you know, they've played a lot of Fortnight and there's some little chip tune songs in there now. But they're like, "I don't really know the origins of this. I've never heard of this old hardware. Every system I've ever raised--I grew up with was CD based." It's like let us show you how it used to be done, or whatever, you could do some kind of educational like children's museum type stuff of "here's how this is done."

JAMES [00:24:50] I never imagined it as a museum, but that's that's a good idea.

ANDREW [00:24:53] It just might be an easy way to, I don't know, make the museum more interesting or the arcade more educational is to kind of intersperse them. Like as you're playing Pacman, there's a Pacman exhibit right next to it or whatever.

JAMES [00:25:04] Well, having said that, the idea of the arcade then was to have a real kind of chiptune experience zone as well. So the idea of that was that maybe some experienced chiptuner's giving demonstrations or teaching people how to make it themselves, because there's this kind of a part of the scene... There's a couple of artists that I wrote down here. Big shout out to bryface and TUBERZ McGEE and Defense Mechanism. Pain Perdu. There's a couple of people keep tune. These guys are teaching others. Basically, they're sharing their information, their instrument creation ideas and how they're making songs, how they're... for example, bryface in particular, he showed how he made how he made a track just using one channel on the Game Boy. The Game Boy has four channels. But he said, "well, this is how you can utilize one channel and this is the sonic ideas that allow you to do it.".

JAMES [00:26:00] For example, if you play a bass kick and then after the bass kick, there's this kind of silence, because it's the idea of the masking effect. If you play a sound really, really loud, your easrs actually can't hear what comes after that for the next maybe half a second or something. If you clap your hands very loud--maybe you're listening to this now and you're at home and you've got nothing else to do. If you clap your hands very

loud, all the background sound will kind of fade out and then come back in again. And this is something that happens in your head that you don't usually notice. It's called the masking effect. So anyway, you can utilize the masking effect in song creations so you can create a loud sound. Leave a break and then you can put some some sounds in afterwards. And your ear doesn't notice that there's been a break that because it just seems natural.

JAMES [00:26:55] But anyway, I'm totally off topic. But this kind of how to make chiptune using acoustic, psycho acoustic knowledge is something that these artists are actually giving to other people. So if you could have an introduction to making music with the Game Boy, a tracker, the Nintendo Entertainment System, some kind of, you know, place where people can learn about how to make this music would be pretty, pretty exciting, I think.

ANDREW [00:27:22] You could have the actual hardware set up for having people like play around with it and follow, you know, if the instructor has some advice. Like just do something with just this channel and here's how you manipulate it. People can actually do that, but you could also do like a more abstract or maybe more user-friendly, I guess, way of doing it, because I've personally used a Little Sound DJ (LSDJ), the one for a Game Boy, and it is very difficult to use for a modern sensibility, where we're used to like apps and thoughtfully designed user experiences. It is not that. So we could have some some setup that are that are also a lot easier, which is kind of big, you know, colorful buttons or simple drag-and-drop style things. For maybe someone who's younger or who doesn't isn't interested in the original hardware and just wants to make cool music, you could have a little bit of a simpler version, you know, running and Arduino or something like that.

JAMES [00:28:16] Have you ever played with nanoloop?

ANDREW [00:28:17] I have not, no.

JAMES [00:28:19] Yeah. Nanoloop is the most abstract thing. It's just it's four by four squares. The interface is just a grid.

ANDREW [00:28:28] So it's like a drum machine kind of thing?

JAMES [00:28:30] Yeah, it's like an MPC. The squares are in a four by four grid and it flashes from top left to bottom. It just goes "de de de de de de de de de de de de de de de de." And it just it keeps on going. And then you can put notes into that grid. And it's basically made into a four by four. All of the left side squares are the first beat. So if you put if you put a sound into those four squares will go "dum dum dum dum." Then you've got the other three squares, a kind of, you know, half tones, if you like, half beats. Half notes, yeah. So nanoloop is really obtuse and really, really kind of abstract, but it's very, very playful. You can just, because it's so live... Like on LSDJ, you kind of have to program it yourself.

ANDREW [00:29:17] Right. That's what seems so weird about it for me, is that it's... There's not a visual interface. You're just kind of changing numbers in different columns. Like it's like a spreadsheet almost.

JAMES [00:29:26] It is like a spreadsheet. And it's not live. But nanoloop, as soon as you put the notes in, it's constantly playing. It doesn't stop. And then you can change the sounds like live. This is the software that I use, actually. So if you want to see somebody

using nanoloop, I think there's still a tutorial on line like "cheapshot nanoloop tutorial." But yeah, this is a really playful piece of software and if you're interested in chip tune and getting started, I recommend nanoloop. Even though it's not as easy to get, get ahold of. It's quite a rare item. It's very, very cool. Very, very playful.

ANDREW [00:30:03] That sounds amazing and I think it is really cool if you can learn those things from your favorite chiptune artists. So might be neat if we have, we'll get into this later, maybe, but if we have a music performance space and so we're bringing in different chips and artists, we can have them record a 15 minute tutorial and then just play that video, you know, for the next three months or whatever until another... So basically so people can kind of choose their own teacher in a way, which is my like a dream version of the future of education. "Choose the English teacher that you get along best with or you like their style" or whatever.

JAMES [00:30:38] Oh, I wish it was like that at my university. Oh, my God, that would be so good.

ANDREW [00:30:42] I know. I wish the world was like that because the teachers are amazing and each have their own style, but they're not going to mesh with every single student. But the students have to be jammed together in the same classroom. I'm sure that's the way the future, it's just not here yet.

JAMES [00:30:56] That is my university experience. So my university has architecture, biology, math, computer science and engineering, so these are the five different students. And luckily, I'm not teaching the biology students. I'm not teaching the architecture students. I'm teaching the computer science students. So the use of games in the classroom is really up their alley, if you like. They're all gamers. They know about, you know, mobile games and PlayStation and P.C. games. But they don't know a lot about analogue games. So it's kind of giving them this kind of game literacy as well.

ANDREW [00:31:30] That's fantastic, though. This is something I care about. I'm a former teacher myself, and I would squeeze in some, like, video game references, like I'd have a lecture teaching something about maths, but it was framed through a video game lense. And I would appeal to like 10 percent of the audience and the other 90 percent would be "well, I'm now even more confused, as if instead of just doing straight up the content, you did all this weird video games stuff." Gah, I was trying to make it cooler, but there's only certain people who are interested in that.

JAMES [00:31:56] That's kind of interesting because I think, from somebody that hasn't really programed a video game myself, and just kind of teased into it, like dipped my toe in the waters, video game development is all about math, isn't it? Everything is math. You've got to get the the trajectories, the gravity, the coordinates, the Cartesian coordinates.

ANDREW [00:32:19] It's there's a series on Khan Academy that uses Pixar technology and their graphics. It's really fascinating how much math is used to create that art. And it's the same stuff as as with modern video games and even old video games like, you know, the parabola of Mario's jump, for example. There's a lot of design that has to go into that to the point where he's not jumping too high too quickly or is not going out too far. There's a lot of balancing, a lot of fine tuning, and it's all math, which is really cool. But yeah, so we've got to nerd out there for a minute, haha, that was enjoyable.

ANDREW [00:32:54] Uh, but yeah, so have an arcade and then sort of an experience next to it.

JAMES [00:32:58] Yes, an arcade with classic games and then somewhere where people can learn about chiptune and get blown away by artists and figure out, "Wow! That's how it's made? Amazing." Like see behind the curtain, I guess.

ANDREW [00:33:08] Right. I think that's fantastic. We could even have modern games there, too. I've had this idea of a business of taking modern indie video games and building arcade cabinets for them. Like as a specialty thing. Just because, though that's a big resurgence of this style of music is if you're making a modern indie game and you want that sound, find someone who's already proven themselves as a chiptune artist and hire them. You know, they're they're good for it. And they're looking for work probably where they can actually use their music to pay off. I think it'd be cool to showcase those as well, because, you know, kids these days are more familiar with Crossy Road and...

JAMES [00:33] We're talking old men, right here haha!

ANDREW [00:33] Right? They know Minecraft and Crossy Road a lot more than Mario and Pacman, you know.

[00:33:48] [Musical break: Enamored – DEFENSE MECHANISM].

JAMES [00:34:21] You mentioned a stage, so I think that would be also interesting, just the stage with performances all day.

ANDREW [00:34:26] I think that'd be so fun.

JAMES [00:34:28] So we have Square Sounds which we run. So we can have the square sound stage, which would be easy. And then there's an artist called Henry Homesweet and he, back about, I want to say, 2011, 2012, maybe a bit earlier. He had this whole series on YouTube called low bit basement where he has two Game Boys from, you know, made in 1989. This is a very old machine. He had two Game Boys with nanoloop cartridges in each one synced with the Sync cable. Remember how you could play together with the Sync cable?

ANDREW [00:34:58] The link cable? Yeah.

JAMES [00:34:59] Yeah, so that they use that cable to make sure that the two machines are playing in sync so that the sound doesn't kind of go out of sync. And essentially he had two Game Boys into a DJ mixer. So then he's playing music and he had a webcam straight above where he was playing. And it's just such a great kind of dirty live kind of thing going on. I thought, well, why don't we just have like this this Henry Holmes suite basement rave going on? Why not? That would be kind of an underground thing.

ANDREW [00:35:31] And that's a good way to avoid the harsh light of the surface world haha. You know, you could have a basement because it is way cooler, the visuals and uh... It fits better in a dark space, I think, than playing out in the sunlight where you can even see your Game Boy screen. And even with the backlight upgrade, you know.

JAMES [00:35:49] Yeah, what you get artists. There's a there's a famous Japanese artist called USK. He's not so active recently. But USK, his thing was he'd have a little torch in

his mouth and he'd be playing and have it have a torch in his mouth so he could see the Game Boy screen because of course, they weren't backlit.

ANDREW [00:36:04] That's really smart. I mean, I guess a headlamp would do that, but that's not nearly as cool.

[00:36:10] [Laugher].

ANDREW [00:36:10] I like that a lot. That's really cool. Having like an underground rave and you can have that at all times of day and you could even do things, you know, when it's maybe off peak hours where musicians not actually physically there, you could still be playing the music really loud, like a dance club kind of vibe and get some lasers and maybe have some pixel style displays.

JAMES [00:36:32] We have V J's, you know, the idea of visual artists and they there's a couple of them that just use an old Nintendo Entertainment System. The NES. And they'll generate some some graphics from there and we'll use that as a VJ stuff. So yeah, they exist.

ANDREW [00:36:48] That's really cool! And then you can can kind of pay homage to the sort of like hack intro screen or like the demo scene back in the day when people would like crack hardware to to share it. They would add their own fun little intro at the beginning and usually they had some really amazing visuals and even chiptune music that was original that they put on as there a little logo like, you know, "this was hacked by this dude," and they'd put this really cool visual...

JAMES [00:37:16] "This crew"

ANDREW [00:37:18] Right. "This crew," it was a lot of kind of pirate gang type stuff going on.

JAMES [00:37:21] Still exist, man, still exist. They're still doing it. Yeah. They're still. They're not doing it to crack games anymore, but they're still making these kind of demos and shout shout outs and stuff. The demo scene is kind of separate to the chiptune scene because it's more about, you know, the visuals and the cracking and pushing these machines to do all these things. But yeah, they're totally still exist.

ANDREW [00:37:43] Have you played have you messed around with the Pico 8 at all?

JAMES [00:37:46] Yes. So now we are probably going to get off topic, but I've been messing around with Pico 8 myself to create visuals from the journal that I run. Yeah, I'm really interested in Pico 8 and I I'm thinking of using it in my game design class with the students to get them to develop games in Pico 8 because it's a beautiful piece of software. You know, you've got the graphics, you've got the coding, you've got the music. It's just fantastic. I really, really like it.

ANDREW [00:38:15] One simple package you can put on any computer. Um... I've got it on. I forgot what it's called. I've got this little tiny handheld computer that's almost Game Boy proportions.

JAMES [00:38:24] Yeah, this thing right? [holds up Pocket Chip computer].

ANDREW [00:38:25] Yeah, that thing! The Pocket Chip computer! It comes on that system, which listeners at home, it's a really cool little crowdfunded computer. But you can get it for--I have it for P.C. the Pico 8. But I love the art style of that. The aesthetic, the little tiny pixels, and I don't know, it's a really cool system. And there's a lot of kind of demo scene stuff on there of people just pushing the limits of what this thing can do.

JAMES [00:38:50] There is. There is.

ANDREW [00:38:51] It's incredible.

JAMES [00:38:52] It's insane. Have you seen Tweets Carts? Are you familiar with this?

ANDREW [00:38:57] No.

JAMES [00:38:57] Okay, so there's an artist on CheapBeats, my friend, is named Dogs++. He's a kind of university student and he got me turned on to it. But there's this whole thing called Tweet Carts where it's... They make a cart, which is essentially a game for the Pico 8. The code that they create is within two hundred eighty characters, essentially. So. If you copy and paste the code from that tweet into Pico 8, it will generate some kind of visual. And they're insane, dude! They're absolutely crazy the things that they're creating with like 280 characters. I just can't believe it. And again, it's all completely deep math stuff either using sine and cosine and loops and all this kind of stuff. It's beyond me.

ANDREW [00:39:43] And I love that it has such limitations on it, kind of like we were talking about with chiptune, but it makes it so easy to foster a kind of interest in, you know, science, technology, engineering, art and math (STEAM).

JAMES [00:39:55] Absolutely. It's brilliant, dude. I'm actually really I really want to get a Pico 8 musician to release on on CheapBeats this year. Actually, that's a goal for the year. There's the guy called Gruber that does some amazing music with the Pico 8, the sound stuff.

[00:39:57] [Musical under conversation: Into the Belt - Gruber]

ANDREW [00:40:10] Two things. One, they've got like a magazine (and I haven't been following the Pico 8 stuff very strongly for maybe three years or so) but before that there was a a little scene that would come out, I think, monthly. And there's also a podcast that often featured musicians making cool stuff within Pico 8. So check those out for the listener. Yeah.

JAMES [00:40:29] And the developer, they made the guy that made it, he lives in Tokyo, so I see him now and again. He owns a cafe in Tokyo.

ANDREW [00:40:36] Right. I think that's like the most sort of romantic possible life I could have ever imagined. Like what--if you asked me as an 8 year old, what's your dream job? I'd be like "probably something with like a Game Boy, and this kind of music and like a cafe? Like in Japan?" That'd be absolutely ideal. And yeah, this guy's doin' it. It's pretty cool. So, yeah, that's an amazing system and it'd be cool to highlight maybe in the the kind of educational type of area, but also to create the graphics for the little club dance basement, you know?

JAMES [00:41:07] Yeah. Pico 8 is fantastic.

ANDREW [00:41:09] It's a really cool system... And really fun games too, man. There was one that's kind of like kind of like billiards where you kind of like change the color of your ball and like consume other ones. I forget how it works exactly, but I was obsessed with that game. There's a lot of fun stuff out there. Try out as many carts as you can get your hands on.

JAMES [00:41:28] There's just saw something, again, we're totally deep off topic now. But I just saw something on Twitter recently that developing 3D games for that now. They're pushing it so hard, they're doing like this faux 3D stuff, like they've got this downhill slalom and things like that.

ANDREW [00:41:46] I've played um, there's an Alone in the Dark, like "demake", so to speak. That's 3D. And that's been around for probably four years now. So I'm sure they've come a long way with that kind of technology. It's incredible. It's just such a low fidelity screen, what they can do with the 3D. I mean, the Pico 8's, huge for sure. I mean, I don't know if it's hugely popular, but it's hugely important, at least to me.

JAMES [00:42:08] Yeah, I agree. I agree.

ANDREW [00:42:10] Oh, man, that's that's really fun. I also like the idea of maybe having contests with the sort of Tweet Carts, is that the phrase?

JAMES [00:42:18] Tweet cart, yeah, yeah.

ANDREW [00:42:20] Having that kind of system as user generated content like, you know, we'll play your video that you created using this system. You know, if you use hashtag, whatever. Tweet at the theme park, we can use your your graphics. Like that'd be so cool. Yeah. If we know you're gonna be in the theme park, we'll put your video in the loop somewhere. That'd be so fun.

JAMES [00:42:41] That's a great that's a great link. You pulled it back, you're a professional haha.

ANDREW [00:42:44] Yeah! Segue! Haha. All right. So what happens when we come back out of the basement? And we're blinded by the harsh light of reality once again, but we're still in the theme park, so that's good. Where do we go next?

JAMES [00:42:56] Another ride idea. Another simple right idea is a dodge 'em cars, right? You call them dungeons in the States?

ANDREW [00:43:03] Bumper cars, I think. Dodge 'ems sounds more fun, though.

JAMES [00:43:06] Yeah, because you dodge them?

ANDREW [00:43:07] Yeah. We just bump him like we don't even try to dodge.

JAMES [00:43:12] Yeah, so the dodge 'ems, I thought we could have... You actually choose your car. The car is you've got a Nintendo one, a Game Boy one, a GBA one and maybe a Mega Drive one or whatever. You can choose your favorite kind of old 8 bit system. And then so it's kind of dodge 'ems or bumper cars, but with some kind of point

system as well, where the more times you bump, all the less times you bump the you win essentially.

ANDREW [00:43:40] Cool. Yeah, you can change the game type to have it be "run away from the others" like in Pac Man. Or smash everyone else, like you're the ghost in Pac Man... I guess it could be Pac Man.

JAMES [00:43:51] Yeah. So it's like NES vs. Game Boy vs. GBA kind of thing.

ANDREW [00:43:55] That's awesome.

JAMES [00:43:57] And then when they bump, they make a typical sound form from that particular system like the NES could maybe make the Mario jump [sound effect], Game Boy could do like a Kirby jump [sound effect]. Sonic [sound effect] I thought that might be kind of a nice idea.

ANDREW [00:44:11] That is a really fun idea. And I love that. That's that's fantastic.

JAMES [00:44:14] So this one's not really chiptune inspired, but more the the hardware inspired.

ANDREW [00:44:17] Right. Which the hardware led to the genre, in a way--or the aesthetic. So, yeah, there's--we're allowed to pay homage there. I think that's a really cool idea.

[00:44:19] [Musical break: Nuage De Lait - Pain Perdu]

JAMES [00:44:52] And then food as well. I thought food might be quite important. So... obviously chips.

ANDREW [00:45:01] Haha! All right. Like square shaped or rectangular chips as if it's a electronic component. Oh yeah, that's...

JAMES [00:45:09] Now here, here's a U.K. / U.S. difference. Where we, in the UK, chips are potato... Sorry, french fries.

ANDREW [00:45:15] Right. And crisps are what we call chips?

JAMES [00:45:18] Correct, yes. So I'm thinking like big chunky potatoes like fries shaped into like the micro processes of that particular hardware or something that that could be quite intricate.

ANDREW [00:45:30] That's really cool and they have like food grade ink. So you could, you know, do the little micro printing like what's physically on there. Print some circuitry and then you can even use food coloring to like there was a big fad in the 90s in the U.S. of having like green ketchup and purple ketchup and like all these like weird food coloring derived things where you could have green chips that'd be really fun and really weird. I don't know how appetizing it is, but people would buy it.

JAMES [00:46:00] And then maybe it comes in like... In Japan it's called a Happy Meal.

ANDREW [00:46:04] Here, too.

JAMES [00:46:05] Okay. So like a Happy Meal box, but it's like the shape of the instrument or something. The hardware.

ANDREW [00:46:09] That console? That's great. Oh, how fun is that? And I also really like that there's kind of different color palettes for each of these different videogame consoles. So it's clear to tell sort of if you're on, you know, team Sega, everything's gonna be pretty much black. And then, yeah, commodore stuff, you could have like wood paneling or like that faux wood look and Nintendo is usually gray but usually has some kind of colorful purple or pink or whatever accents. Oh, that's fun.

JAMES [00:46:41] And then there's an artist called Pain Perdu from France and "Pain Perdu" in English it means French toast, I believe. You know, the eggs and the milk and the bread. So maybe that's something that we sell as well, French toast.

ANDREW [00:46:56] Yeah and that's really fun too. Your menu could be made up of... Almost like they do with cocktails where they'll make a cocktail, and name and after some celebrity or something, because those ingredients kind of relate to their name or what they're famous for. We could do something like that.

JAMES [00:47:10] So you just reminded me of something that's not on my document here. There's a bar there's a bar in Kyoto, in Japan. And it's called La Siesta. And it's ran by a chiptune artist called Master Quarter. And he's he's he's got like these kind of 8 bit themed bar. And he has all these original cocktails based on like game characters. I can't remember from the top of my head, but his whole menu of drinks is like cocktails, but like a Kirby punch or something or, you know, all these different drinks. There we go.

ANDREW [00:47:40] That's fantastic. Yeah. We can just borrow from all of the "Barcades" around the world. Or, I think "Barcade" is a copy-written term, but arcade bars. Like I know I've had a Bloody Mario, which was just a Bloody Mary, but it was really good. I think they might have used beer instead of tequila or something. But anyway, people have thought long and hard about this already and I can just borrow the names.

JAMES [00:48:03] That's cool. I like that a lot.

ANDREW [00:48:04] Oh yeah. That's really fun because you got to have food. Even if it was just burgers and fries, people would just go buy it. But if we can make it a little bit more thematic and "plus" it a little bit, we might as well.

JAMES [00:48:15] So I guess we're kind of lucky with chiptune in that we can we can think of the music, we can think of the artists, we can also think of the hardware. So, yeah, there's a lot of crossover here. It's kind of like a game, music, you know, all these different things being pushed in together.

ANDREW [00:48:21] And I'm hoping right now that the the listener is just yelling at their speaker, saying, "I have this amazing idea for a name of a food. That's a really fun pun or something." But I'm sorry, guys, we can't hear you. You'll have to hit us up on social media.

[00:48:29] [Musical break: Hive - Balloonbear]

JAMES [00:49:09] There's an artist called Balloonbear. So maybe he could be giving out balloon bears to the kids. Just very simple, corny stuff like this.

ANDREW [00:49:16] Even if it's just regular, you know, "we have an employee who does the balloon stuff." They can also be selling Balloonbear merch right there at the little balloon station, like it's just a fun... I think it's really interesting when places do that where you can only buy THIS item at THAT physical location. Even if it's in a theme park. It's like the gift shop doesn't have every single thing available. You kind of have to journey around and find it in kind of an exclusive location. I think that makes it more magical. Or if you're you go into the theme park and you're like, "you know, I love this. This specific musician." And then as you're walking by, you're like, "Oh, my God, I get it. This is a reference to their name. I need to go check over there. Maybe that's where the T-shirts are for them." Having like a collect a thon kind of aspect would be really fun.

JAMES [00:50:01] I like that. Maybe a stamp rally or something as well. I've got it. I've got it. When you enter the theme park, you get a Game Boy, an actual Game Boy. And then as you go around, you collect the four batteries for the back. Haha. And then the cartridge. And then when you leave, you've got like your Game Boy as a music player and the cartridges preloaded with all the artists' tracks.

ANDREW [00:50:10] Oh, that's excellent.

JAMES [00:12] And then as you exit through the gift shop, you've got the merchandise from all the artists, the C.D., the T-shirts, things like this.

[00:50:16] [Musical break: バースデーパーティ (Birthday Party) - Tobokegao]

ANDREW [00:50:52] This is a really fun theme park and I feel like it's kind of a physical manifestation of of this auditory experience. Although there is a lot of really great visual elements, especially the album art, music videos and sort of the video VJ stuff we were talking about. So yeah. It's a cool way to explore and let people walk around within this world.

JAMES [00:51:17] And then hopefully we'll get more people buying chiptune music.

ANDREW [00:51:19] Yeah, 100 percent! And, oh man. We should also have some sort of pixel artists would be really cool. Not only for light the light effects in the club, but pixel art everywhere. You know, if if there's gonna be a fence with bushes behind it--.

JAMES [00:51:33] The backgrounds. Yeah. Yeah.

ANDREW [00:51:34] Backgrounds. Exactly. Instead of having actual shrubbery. Just have pixel art of shrubbery. Instead of having a caricature artists just drawing, they could be doing pixel art of you and your family.

JAMES [00:51:46] Mmm! That's a great idea.

ANDREW [00:51:46] You can do a lot of fun stuff. And there's a lot of really amazing pixel artists as well that we could feature here or have them do a little performance or whatever or just kind of contribute art to the theme park. That'd be really cool. We should bring in former guest Matej Jan. He's got the Pixel Art Academy project that he's working on and he's an amazing pixel artist. But that could be a really cool way of teaching people about

how to make pixel art and kind of what goes into that. So it'd be really cool to to include him somewhere.

JAMES [00:52:19] Yeah, I agree.

[00:52:26] [Musical break: Final Flight - cTrix]

JAMES [00:52:43] You know, in Disney World or Disneyland, you have a kind of mountain. But why don't we have the Atari logo as the mountain in the center?

ANDREW [00:52:53] Woah, that's beautiful. And I always saw that logo as like three slides for some reason, probably because I love playgrounds. So like, yeah, they could be huge slides, even inside there. Like, it's a tunnel. That's great, man.

JAMES [00:53:27] There's an artists called cTrix, and because it says tricks, I thought he could be doing a magic show. Just because his name's "see tricks" right?

ANDREW [00:53:36] Right. Yeah. You're going see some tricks, haha. It's really cute. Well, I mean, the more types of entertainment we can have, the better. And if it's a pun or a reference, then that gives us an excuse to put in the theme park. I love it. I just love the idea of being able to give a physical world to this stuff and to the different record labels like you could have each, you know, net label have a physical store. I don't know if you'd do physical media. Probably just digital downloads or something, but if people have a vinyl pressings or whatever we could have that represented here as well. And maybe some some kind of cool high tech point of sale, like where you can buy the digital album there and get it on your phone. Sometimes I think people are more prone to buy something when they go into a physical store.

JAMES [00:53:45] Yeah, it's interesting. You know, merch sells quite well. People like to see people still like to buy physical objects rather than for a download code. I was I was pretty concerned when, well, not concerned, I was a bit worried when we first did a vinyl release, but [snap] they sold like that. We also did a... I don't have it here, but we did a Mega Drive cartridge release and that sold out like within the week as well.

ANDREW [00:53:50] That is the coolest thing I've ever heard of. I would totally buy that. Maybe, hey, maybe we can cash in on that kind of thing. Like if you want to sort of buy your memories of the day, you know, instead of selling people like pictures of them on the roller coaster, they can buy a cartridge of... It has, you know, their caricature of like, their little avatar, that digital like a pixel artist made and maybe any songs that they created in the music creation area. You know, a little demo of the musician who is playing that that day, whatever. We can kind of load in like some stuff in there and, you know, push the limits of the physical capacity of the cartridge, maybe.

JAMES [00:54:01] Oh, or maybe like Game Boy camera... On the roller coaster, it uses the Game Boy camera. So it's just like one pixel for your face or something.

ANDREW [00:54:30] Haha, that is so funny!

JAMES [00:55:41] It prints out on the Game Boy printer as well.

ANDREW [00:54:55] Wow. What a cool aesthetic that was. I loved that, that system was really fun.

[00:55:02] [Musical break Legend of the Bear Punch – TUBERZ McGee]

JAMES [00:55:25] The last thing I thought of was a nanloop maze, because I mentioned nanoloop being this very kind of grid based software. Maybe we could have a maze where people go through and it's kind of playing so you can see these flashing lights as they're going through. And it's he's got these sounds coming out and you're just very, you know, discombobulated all over the place.

ANDREW [00:55:39] That sounds really cool. And you could make it kind of a gameplay mechanism where maybe there's like... As kind of the the metronome or whatever, the bouncing ball, so to speak, is lighting up. Maybe that's a red light or something. And when the red light shines in your area, you're supposed to like freeze or something. So you're like trying to find your way through this maze. But you have to keep track of the rhythm.

JAMES [00:56:02] Yes. And you could maybe be following the sound like "this is the sound. I need to go this way."

ANDREW [00:56:12] Yeah. We could make it more like a game inside a maze with rhythm and--oh man. And there's so much cool stuff we could do here.

[00:56:20] [Musical break: Skeptic - cheapshot]

ANDREW [00:57:16] Dude. This has been so much fun. Thank you so much for being on the show.

JAMES [00:57:20] Well, I'm glad. I'm glad we got enough material out of this this idea. I mean, I was a little bit concerned.

ANDREW [00:57:26] I was, too, but I mean, you're an expert. And I'm a fan. So, man, it worked out. If the audience enjoyed listening to you, and I'm sure that they have, how can they find out more about you and your record label and your your music performances?

JAMES [00:57:39] There's a really good website called Chiptunes = Win (chiptuneswin.com/blog). They are kind of a chiptune news website. They they put out all information on new releases, not just my label. But yeah, that's a really good resource. Chiptunes = win. Yeah, my label is called CheapBeats because you know, we're very cheap beats.

ANDREW [00:57:58] I figured it was a spin off of your musician's name. Is that right?

JAMES [00:58:02] Yes. Cheapshot and Laser Beat. We came together to make the label. The problem is, if you if you Google search "cheap beats," you just get like loads of discount vouchers for beats headphones. Yeah, we're just CheapBeats. One word. Yeah. So that's my record label. And the philosophy of the record label is we are trying to bring kind of outside of Japan chiptune artists like showcase them in Japan and then also show showcase Japanese chiptune artists to the world. That was the original concept. But now we just kind of like a global label.

ANDREW [00:58:35] Very cool. And where is Square Sounds happening? Like where can people go see a live performance?

JAMES [00:58:42] You can go and see a live performance is in a few different places. But Square Sounds runs in Melbourne, Australia and Tokyo, Japan and they're about six months apart. Yeah. So we we run in September, October, time and Square Sounds Melbourne is February, March time.

ANDREW [00:58:58] Very cool. And then anyone out there who's interested in podcasts for one and also education, that kind of educational tangents we went off on. Can you tell us a little bit about the Lucic Language Pedagogy Journal?

JAMES [00:59:10] Wow. Okay. Big Segue.

ANDREW [00:59:11] Sorry, I I'm a nerd for teaching stuff and especially games in the classroom.

JAMES [00:59:16] So I am a teacher as a day job and I use games to teach with. I'm looking in my context that I'm pretty much given free reign to teach how I want to teach. I'm involved in language teaching with video games and board games. But there's really not a lot of research from the teacher side like "this is how I'm doing it. This is why I did it. This is the framework that I used." And so me and my colleague, Jonathan deHaan, who's based in Japan as well, we decided to make a journal. An online open access journal, showcasing the amazing work that teachers are doing around games in the classroom and how to teach with games, because, you know, everyone knows how to teach with a text book or movies. And even comics are becoming quite well known as a teaching material. But video games and games are still kind of like controversial almost.

ANDREW [01:00:11] Right. It's more avant garde. It's cutting edge. There's not a lot of resources out there. That's why I like Hey Listen Games (heylistengames.org) so much. It's got all these amazing plug-and-play resources.

JAMES [01:00:21] Absolutely. I have a PhD in this kind of field and I'm, you know, writing research papers on how games can be used to teach certain skills. But there's just not a lot from the teachers perspective. There's a lot of kind of preliminary studies, pilot studies, and then they just end. Ludic Language Pedagogy is my academic journal online resource for, yeah, anything to do with teaching languages and literacy skills with games.

ANDREW [01:00:53] That's super cool. And yeah, that's LLPjournal.org. Awesome. If anybody has any any feedback or more ideas and maybe we can get more specific about like the menu and stuff like that. Feel free to follow Amusement Sparks on social media. It's @amusementsparks. Usually it's easier to Google it as two words because "amusementsparks" one word, they think the "s" was a typo and you meant amusement parks... But yeah, thanks for listening. Thank you for being on the show, James. And have a good one!

[Musical intro: Amusement Sparks Theme – Andrew Spohn]