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Axel, Sat 25 Aug 2007

Interview with Amusic

by Axel and Runaro of Brainstorm

Although first to discover logic, geometry, plumbing, and analog computers, the Greeks were latecomers to the demoscene. Greece's first formal demoparty, The Gardening, was held in 1995 when the rest of Europe had already seen an entire generation of sceners come and go along with 8-bit and 16-bit computers. Groups like Andromeda Software Development have more than made up for this delay, releasing demos like Planet Risk and Iconoclast, which are two of the most inspiring demos in later years.

Sotiris Varotsis, better known as aMUSIC, is a Greek musician and has been a member of ASD since 2001. ZINE caught aMUSIC at a quiet moment and asked him a few questions about ASD, the Greek demoscene, music, and life in general.

ZINE: Why do you think Greece was absent from the demoscene for so long?

aMUSIC: Like pretty much everything else, Greece came to know the demoscene rather late. Our first party ever was held in 1995 and, consequently, the maturity of Greek sceners needed some time to develop-time which was cut short after 1997 when dEUS, the best Greek demogroup at that time, decided to go inactive and stop organizing The Gardening.

Greece's demo-silence was probably due to the lack of national demoparties. The three year period following 1997 was, by many, thought of as the official Greek demoscene death. No motivation, no scene spirit, no productions. After 2000 there were some efforts to create some parties, which were mostly gaming gatherings with demo-watching as an added bonus to remember the old days. At one of those parties, ASD surprised everyone by actually releasing the first ever accelerated Greek demo (Cadence and Cascade). Suddenly there was motivation again. People got involved with the scene once again and started forming groups, producing demos and generally rebuilding the scene spirit.

ZINE: You were also doing stuff on the C64 and the Amiga, and you have strong influences from there. How come it wasn't until the PC days that ASD really took off, and not earlier?

aMUSIC: Personally, I got into the scene when I had an Amiga. Even though I was a proud owner of a C64, I was way too young to even know about the existence of the demoscene, or what a demo was. I've written some 100 mods on the Amiga - many of which are well hidden since I can't even stand listening to them - and my first scene attempt was the creation and organization of the "20 MeEhNuTz Chipcompo", an IRC-only chiptune composing competition held in #trax on anothernet, and probably the first ever online



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competition to incorporate a samplepack. The "20mc" produced quite a lot of noisy chiptunes, but also some real gems. ASD on the other hand, started off directly on the PC in the early 90's, building small BBStros. ASD's first demo was released at the Gardening '95 and won first place, albeit among very few entries.

ZINE: Two musicians, Mr.Man and Lizard of the Amiga group Andromeda, influenced your early days of composing. Were they also an inspiration for ASD, to some extent, to borrow the name from that group?

aMUSIC: Actually, Mr.Man and Lizard are the reasons I started tracking. I really liked their music and was like: "I wish I could write stuff like that". And so I did. I also recall that my very first emotional tune was named "War of the Lizards" as a tribute to Lizard. I'm glad that I've been able to find Lizard many years later online and express my gratitude for his being an inspiration. I'm still searching for Mr.Man, though. And no, ASD chose their name around 1992. That's 3 to 4 years before I learned about their existence.

ZINE: Not even the slightest thought of: "the Amiga Andromeda is dead, we can surely take the name?"

aMUSIC: This is turning into the beating of a dead horse, as it has been explained lots of times in various media. First and foremost, Andromeda is not dead. Now, let's go over the story again. When Navis decided on the name Andromeda Software Development, he was not even aware of the Amiga group. The name selection was based on the fact that the word "Andromeda" comes from Greek mythology. In 1992 there was no internet in Greece, and long distance calls to exchange FidoNet messages on BBSs were so expensive that very few ever did it. Of course, I've known of Andromeda since I started watching demos, and I was a tad curious about ASD's name selection when I found about them in 1996. I joined ASD much later, in 2001, so it's safe to say that the name has not been influenced by the Amiga Andromeda group, and that it's totally coincidental.

Recently, we've discussed it with the people from Andromeda and cleared it out. Both groups are perfectly OK with it, so I guess everyone is worried about this "name clash" except the two groups that are directly involved.

ZINE: How did you meet Navis and Amoivikos?

aMUSIC: That must have been at The Gardening '96. Since Greece had a very small scene, we all came to know each other fairly easy.

ZINE: You have strong design skills too. How come you're not more involved with the design of ASD's demos?

aMUSIC: What gives you the idea that I'm not involved with the design? We never boast a "design by" credit in our demos, because we're all involved with the design process. Most of the design work, of course, falls with Navis, but we take quite some time discussing design elements on IRC or through our mailing lists. Sure, each of us has their specialized field, but we all give pointers and comments on the work of other people. I frequently find myself giving opinions about Navis's effects or Amoivikos's graphics, and at the same time receive comments about the music that I write and suggestions about making it better, or tying it more effectively with the visuals.



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ZINE: You've won most big compos, garnered a lot of respect and acclaim. What drives your motivation to stay in the scene?

aMUSIC: With each demo we make, we learn something new. We mature and we get this notion that in the next demo we can do even better, therefore enhancing our skills. Winning compos is of course a very rewarding experience, but so is knowing that you've become better at what you do. Furthermore, we're having tremendous fun working together on demos. Each one contributing a tiny bit and finally watching those bits fall into place and forming something that makes us feel happy and awed. We'll keep doing demos and remain in the scene for as long as we keep having fun and have something to contribute.

ZINE: You were nominated for the Best Soundtrack at the Scene.org Awards in 2003 and 2004, but never won. Surely it hurts a tiny bit.

aMUSIC: Actually, I've been nominated 4 times in a row for that award, from 2003 to 2006 - three of which were for co-ops with Leviathan - and never won. And yes, it surely hurts when you put a lot of effort and creativity into the song, or when you check out the winning one and think to yourself "Oh come on, this can't possibly be better than my track." On the other hand, being nominated 4 times in a row is something that many scene musicians would love to have.

ZINE: Is the Scene.org Award a missing crown jewel that you'd love to get some day?

aMUSIC: The soundtrack one? Of course. Maybe 5th time is the charm. As for ASD, we've already won the Scene.org Award for Best Demo with Planet Risk, the Public's Choice Award twice, with Planet Risk and Iconoclast, and the Best Effects one with Evolution of Vision.

ZINE: In a lot of your music it's possible to hear Greek cultural influences. Is that something that is important to you, to feature some Greek elements in your soundtracks?

aMUSIC: This might sound weird to you, but I'm actually not a fan of Greek music. It's not the rhythms and instruments per se, but mostly the cultural phenomenon happening in Greece for the past decade or so, where the music is uninspired, copied and pasted a lot, and hugely based on lyrics sporting sexual connotation or erotic disappointment. I'd say that the one track I've made - Amphetamine Tears, the soundtrack of Iconoclast - features influences from the music of a lot of countries and regions. Certainly from Greece with Bouzouki and Mandolin, the orient with the percussion, France and Italy with the accordion parts, and more western tones with the electric guitar. All in all, when I sit and write music I never think of where I'm getting influence from. I just write, and if it sounds good then it stays.

ZINE: You have a lot of side projects such as SIRadio. Do you consider yourself a "workaholic"?

aMUSIC: I wouldn't consider "work" something that I have fun doing. I'm a creative person and always searching for ways to vent my creativity. The downside of this is that I find myself involved with one project too many, thus limiting my time severely. I've wished so



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many times that a day had 48 hours.

Haven't we all.