

A Historical Analysis of Sogno di Volare

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64:131 Music History and Literature: General Survey II

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April 25th, 2022

Composition for video games faces a unique challenge compared to regular classical and operatic music. Classical compositions are usually performed once within a concert of many different pieces. Video game music, on the other hand, needs to be able to loop for hours and not have the listener get sick of it. Tasked with capturing the broad ideas of pushing limits, exploration, and invention, through the past, present, and future, Christopher Tin for Sid Meier's Civilization games releases in 2005 and 2016. After his success with his first video game piece, *Baba Yetu* in 2005 for the game Civilization IV, Tin was asked to come back and write the title song for Civilization VI, which he named *Sogno di Volare*. Both games are about the development of the world throughout human history, starting by establishing a town and growing into a full nation while navigating interaction with friends and enemies. Tin wanted to capture those ideas of exploration and progression for the piece that would end up being the theme song of Civilization VI, settling on the text of a modern-Italian adaption of a quote attributed to Leonardo di Vinci about the development of flight.¹

Born to immigrant parents from Hong Kong, Christopher Tin grew up in California and studied music at Stanford University. During his time there, he participated in a student exchange to Oxford, and at the end of his degree, he received a scholarship to London Royal College of Music². Tin has worked on many popular movies over the years, *X2: X-Men United* (2003), *Sausage Party* (2016), and *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) being some of note³. His first experience working on a video game score was for the 2005 game, *Civilization IV*. In the composer's notes

¹ *Behind-the-Scenes: Sogno Di Volare*. Christopher Tin, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vU6TQB_Hpks.

² TWM, "Christopher Tin," IMDb (IMDb.com), accessed April 20, 2022, https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1439725/?ref_=nmbio_bio_nm.

³ TWM, "Christopher Tin," IMDb (IMDb.com), accessed April 20, 2022, https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1439725/?ref_=nmbio_bio_nm.

for Baba Yetu on his website, Tin explains why he took a Swahili setting of the Lord's Prayer to portray the development of civilization. "Missionaries of the 19th-century used Swahili as the lingua franca for spreading Christianity across East Africa; consequently, a rich tradition of vocal music arose that blended European harmonies with traditional African call-and-response."⁴ Tin also explains that this was also because of Civilization IV's primary focus on Africa and religion⁵. In 2011, Baba Yetu became the first ever video game theme that was nominated for⁶, and won a Grammy.⁷

Tin's approach to writing video game music is to look at stills and demonstrations of the game in progress to develop ideas. When Tin came back to the franchise to work on Civilization VI in 2016, he found similar inspiration to Baba Yetu. This new game had a more Euro-centric focus than the Africa-centric Civilization IV Tin had worked with before.⁸ He wanted to capture the ideas of "both the physical exploration of seeking new lands, but also the mental exploration of expanding the frontiers of science and philosophy."⁹ This lead Tin toward a quote by Leonardo di Vinci, as he was one of the most innovative and influential minds and figures from history. "Once you have taken flight, you'll decide. Gaze towards the sky, you'll know that this

⁴ Christopher Tin, "Baba Yetu," Christopher Tin - Baba Yetu, accessed April 16, 2022, <https://christophertin.com/sheetmusic/babayetu.html>.

⁵ *Behind-the-Scenes: Sogno Di Volare*. Christopher Tin, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vU6TQB_Hpks.

⁶ Mark Langshaw, "Civ IV' Theme Nominated for Grammy," Digital Spy (Digital Spy, October 25, 2018), <https://www.digitalspy.com/videogames/a291495/civ-iv-theme-nominated-for-grammy/>.

⁷ Tom Senior, "Civilization 4 Wins Grammy for Baba Yetu Six Years after Release," pcamer (PC Gamer, February 14, 2011), <https://www.pcamer.com/civilization-4-wins-grammy-award/>.

⁸ *Behind-the-Scenes: Sogno Di Volare*. Christopher Tin, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vU6TQB_Hpks.

⁹ Chris Bratt, "The Composer of the Civilization 4 Theme Returns for Civilization 6," Eurogamer.net (Eurogamer.net, July 11, 2016), <https://www.eurogamer.net/civilization-6-theme-to-be-composed-by-grammy-winning-christopher-tin>.

is where your heart will feel at home.”¹⁰ The symbolic use of flight as societal progression blends together the earlier aspirations of flight as reaching for progress and the infinite possibilities of where society can go with that freedom of flight.

Sogno di Volare originally served three functions: as the soundtrack to the game’s cinematic trailer to get people excited for the game, as an opening cinematic to the start of the game to introduce the story and ideas, and as the title theme in the main menu. Not only does a piece like this have to be able to stand on its own as a song, but it has to be engaging, convey certain emotions, excite people to play the game, and also be repeatable. This song meets all of those criteria.

As a song that represents and celebrates human exceptionalism, Sogno di Volare goes above and beyond its role as a video game theme and joins Christopher Tin’s previous masterpiece of *Baba Yetu* as one of the greatest orchestral and choral video game compositions. Sogno di Volare is a versatile piece of music that does its job perfectly no matter which role it is filling. The ideas captured by Tin of physical and intellectual exploration represented through the orchestration and lyrics, turn the piece into an inspiring anthem and memorable theme.

¹⁰ *Behind-the-Scenes: Sogno Di Volare*. Christopher Tin, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vU6TQB_Hpks.

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