

"RESIDENT EVIL: THE UMBRELLA CHRONICLES" (Soundtrack Review)

Written by Trevor Parker

Sunday, 09 January 2011 12:29



After it was announced late last year that the mighty CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS had easily matched AVATAR's astronomical billion-dollar gross in a matter of weeks, blockbuster video games now seem poised to overtake movies in terms of pop culture prominence. Furthering the Silicon Valley versus Hollywood comparison, the resilient RESIDENT EVIL series has acted as the gaming world's very own endless horror-franchise since 1996. And like their big screen competitors, the RESIDENT EVIL games have long relied on moody musical cues to intensify atmospherics and add jolt to jump scares.

THE UMBRELLA CHRONICLES is a 2007 RESIDENT EVIL sequel produced for the Nintendo Wii, and its soundtrack album is finally available as a domestic release from Sumthing Distribution. Credited in the disc's shamefully barren liner notes as 'ghm sound team', Masafumi Takada and Jun Fukuda are the actual composers behind the music. Your loyal Fango reviewer decided to tackle the UMBRELLA album without ever having played the actual game that inspired it, intending to determine if this music could still be engaging when peeled away from its visual aspect.

UMBRELLA clocks in at an ungainly forty-nine tracks, and their individual brevity hampers the album's flow and focus. Gathering similar cuts and blending them into longer suites would have been much kinder to listeners. The album as a whole offers little in the way of melody or grand themes, concerned instead with spinning an aura of dread or amplifying frenetic action sequences. To this end, we get lots of skittering minor-key synth riffs with ominous, monotone bass droning underneath, followed by startling bursts of percussion. Occasionally, the composers deviate from this pattern and stretch their eclecticism, and the results are surprisingly catchy. Tracks like 'The Epileptic Express' and 'The Zombie Who Came In From The Cold' add an unexpected spurt of house rhythms, and 'Slight Injury' even flirts with a hip-hop beat and G-funk squeals. Other highlights can be found in 'No Word for it' with its simulated theremin warbling, and 'Begin here' excellently recalls Mark Snow's X-FILES theme song. The album peaks with the unique, unsettling and frankly beautiful atonality of 'Initial R'.

On the downside, UMBRELLA fails miserably when trying to digitally construct traditional orchestral and choral arrangements. These attempts clog up the majority of the album's running time and come across as tinny and cheap. For example, 'Tetrodotoxin' and 'Sympathy for the Zombie' may as well be cuts from the score to some impoverished SyFy-channel creature farce, and the closing blats of 'Endtroduction' sound suspiciously like they were performed on a whoopee cushion. Even worse, the deceivingly-titled 'Blacken Sabbath' is a lame New Age chill-out more suited to soothing chakras down at the corner yoga studio than accompanying

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scenes of zombie bloodshed.

Veteran gamers may listen to this soundtrack and feel the saliva in their mouths instantly evaporate as they flashback to hordes of digitized undead bearing down on them with jaws clapping. For the rest of us without that frame of reference, the mostly tepid music found here will be nowhere near as effective. Spend your fifteen bucks on downloadable CALL OF DUTY zombie levels instead.



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