

**This interview with
KOJI KONDO
was conducted by the Library of Congress
on April 12, 2023**



Koji Kondo

Library of Congress: On behalf of the Library of Congress, congratulations on having the Super Mario Brothers theme song entered into the National Recording Registry. How does it feel to have one of your musical compositions now be preserved forever?

Koji Kondo: It is such an honor. I'm very happy to have my music added to this selection of classic songs.

LC: Can you tell us about the origins of the Super Mario theme?

KK: You know there are several songs included in this four and a half minutes. And they were all made using just the three basic waveform sounds and one sound available [from] a family computer. That is what was released in North America as the Nintendo Entertainment System.

Of course, there were, you know, a lot of difficulties making songs for all the different game scenes from these limited tones and timbres. But the joy of coming up with ideas was certainly there.

Now current game consoles don't have the same limitations. But just like I used to do back in the day, I still always challenge myself when making new music to come up with rhythms

that are easy to get into and that have memorable melodies in order to make games more fun to play.

I never would have imagined the songs I made back then would be listened to by so many people worldwide.

I'm very grateful the songs are now being arranged and used for things other than games such as orchestras, concerts, theme parks, and movies.

And I'd like to offer my sincere thanks to the game fans who have played the game so many times, and of course, the Nintendo staff who worked on the game with me for making this possible. Thanks very much.

LC: When you hear the Super Mario Brothers theme today, what emotions and memories does it bring to mind?

KK: I do have a lot of fun memories of the trials and errors that we went through making all the different sounds.

At the time, you know, I thought the “family sound” was a bit monotonous, but you know, my thinking has changed over time, and now I feel that the sound has a unique flavor that's not readily found anywhere else.

LC: Before working with Nintendo, what was your musical history and what genres and artists influenced you?

KK: I played the electric organ from around the age of five through high school. And I was also the keyboard player in a hard rock and fusion cover band I formed while I was in junior high school music. I was really interested in, in all kinds of different music genres from classical to world music. You know, at the time I was particularly fond of jazz infusion and influenced by artists like Herbie Hancock.

LC: And how did you first get hired by Nintendo?

KK: I saw a posting in a recruitment flyer while I was at university. I liked games. I liked sound creation and, of course, I liked making music, so I thought this is the perfect vocation for me. I actually only took one employment exam and that was for Nintendo.

LC: What was it like in those days working at Nintendo while you were all designing the Super Mario?

KK: I just looked forward to going to work every day, to the point where, even on Sundays, I just looked forward to Mondays coming around.

LC: I can only imagine. It must have been loads of fun to work there at that time. What do you think made the Super Mario Brothers game unique?

KK: When I first saw the game, the blue skies left quite an impression. Up until that time, you know, most all games had this very black background. So I thought that these were fun looking visuals, quite groundbreaking. I also had a feeling that this game might be something that could turn into a series and continue for a long time.

LC: You had mentioned some of the technological constraints you had for composing music for the game. How, what, are some ways that you were able to work within those limits?

KK: First, of course, there were sound limitations. There were only three notes, musical notes, and one white noise note to produce interval. Additionally, the amount of data that we could use for music and sound effects was extremely small. So I really had to be very innovative and make full use of the musical and programming ingenuity that we had. So I, we really [had to] compose songs and create sounds that helped to reduce the amount of data that was needed.

LC: Can you tell us a little bit about how the music can enhance the experience of the person playing a game and how you composed for the different game environments like that blue sky?

KK: I used all sorts of genres that matched what was happening on screen. We had jingles to encourage players to try again after, you know, getting a "Game Over." Then fanfares to congratulate them for reaching goals, pieces that sped up when the time remaining grew short, things like that. So I composed this type of interactive music with the aim of making the games more fun to play.

LC: One of the elements that is very distinct to the main theme is the rhythm. Can you describe it and what are some of the challenges you encountered while programming the rhythm?

KK: So the melody and the base parts are divided equally, but you know the rhythm high hat is divided into triple. And I think that the gap between, the even distribution and the triplet distribution, is what gives the music the feeling of moving forward. I really wasn't aiming for that, at the time. I tried using rhythm from a different song I was working on and it just happened to feel good, so I adopted it for this piece.

LC: So how do you work repetition into the compositions without them sounding too repetitive.

KK: That was also something that I really wasn't aiming at when I was composing. It wasn't something at the top of my mind, but I think it's probably because there are four motifs to the music and each of those motifs is unique. They don't sound like the other motifs, and that's why it doesn't sound too repetitious.

LC: Just talking about the overall cultural impact, why do you think the Super Mario Brothers game and the character of Mario has had such a lasting impact?

KK: I think it's because Super Mario Brothers is a game with simple pick up and play controls that anyone can play. There are a lot of different gameplay elements for them to enjoy. Mario's character design is simple to understand. Plus he's appeared in new games over such a long period of time that I think he's become a familiar character with fans of many different age groups. And, as for the music, I think it's become widely known and has kept its appeal because so people around the globe have played Super Mario for such a long time. And because there are many different occasions outside the game where the music has been played.

LC: When people listen to this music decades from now, what do you hope they will feel from it?

KK: I'd be really grateful if they really said to themselves, "This is game music from 1985 and I think I wanna play that game!"

Actually, it's something I said at the beginning of the interview, but it's just that this, that having this music preserved alongside so many other classic songs is such a great honor for me. It's actually, it's a little bit difficult to believe. I'm extremely happy about this development.