Fly Music

Date - 3/23/2008

Changing Difficulty Through Music

Genre
Scrolling Shooter

High Concept
Fly Music is your standard scrolling shooter, except its difficulty is varied based on the music, which is modified through user actions.

Premise
Fly Music is much like your standard vertical scrolling shooter, except that it attempts to enhance the user experience by adjusting the difficulty for a user on the fly. In other words, the game has a modular difficulty that attempts to achieve the correct challenge level for any given user's skill level.

In a normal vertical shooter, the player collects powerups that make their ship stronger, but the enemy remains the same regardless. In Fly Music, a player can, during the game, collect as many difficulty increasing (or decreasing) modifiers as they want. These modifiers adjust the music, which is directly linked to the game difficulty. For example, the tempo of the song determines how fast the game is played. In this way, the music is the primary indicator to the user how difficult the game is becoming without making a user learn the details of the difficulty system. As a result, a player can focus on the game rather than a complex UI that tells them how they are modifying the game.

The game is still made a challenge for any skilled user by making scoring directly related to how difficult the game is being made. Top scores will only be achievable through increased difficulty.

Goal
The goal of the game is to complete the levels while getting as high of a score as possible.

How It Works
Basic Mechanics
The scrolling is vertical, with the player being a ship facing upwards. Enemies will approach from any direction (though typically the top) and can fire at the player. The player can fight back with lasers. If the player touches an enemy, or is hit by enemy fire, they lose a life. At the end of each level, there will be a boss fight who is stronger than the rest of the enemies you fight.

Game Difficulty Modulation
Each level will start off with a basic, slow beat. As the player progresses, glowing squares will occasionally fall from the top of the screen which the player can move over in order to modify their difficulty. These squares will both be easy to get (not randomly moving about), but will also be avoidable if the player chooses. The squares will have a symbol inside which represents what they change about the music, and they will glow different colors based on whether or not it makes the game easier or harder.

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The music's complexity can be changed in three ways. Speeding up the tempo speeds up the enemy's movements and weapons. Some squares will change the complexity of the music, giving the enemy more complex movement patterns on the screen. Adding instruments will give the enemy more weapons to fire at the player with.

Ultimately, the game can be kept very easy (if no squares are collected) to very hard (if all squares are collected). Whenever a player is killed, extra squares which decrease the difficulty will fall to give the player the option of making the game easier.

Scoring
Each enemy killed gives a set number of points. You also have a multiplier based on the current difficulty of the game. The score you get from each kill is the product of the enemy's points and the multiplier the user has when the enemy is killed.

Success & Failure Conditions
The player will have a certain number of lives. Each time they are hit by enemy fire, they lose a life. The player loses the game once they run out of lives, and wins the game if they can complete all the levels without running out of lives.

Carrot Says:

Title: Fly Music

Written by: rkcr

Week 1

High Concept: Nice and to the point and it gets across the main idea.

Critique: In what is an otherwise standard shooter game; the Treatment introduces and interesting twist in how the difficulty level is selected and adjusted. Most games either come with preset difficulty levels or adapt to the player's projected skill based on their performance, *Fly Music* nicely combines these two standards to create a fresh new method of difficulty adjustment.

It's a shame that the rest of the game is so by the numbers because it's hard to say if this user adaptive difficulty is enough to hold interest. Although it very well may be enough for the competitive *Guitar Hero* crowd, which is a game that I can see shares a lot of similarities with *Fly Music*. The competitive scoring mechanic alone sounds like it will be the main draw of *Fly Music*, with optimal difficulty paths being developed just like optimal star power paths in *Guitar Hero*. I think that there could be a little bit more done to the mechanic to tweak it for the most possible competition, *Guitar Hero* has the star power mechanic, *Fly Music* needs something like it.

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The Treatment does a good job of detailing the base and unique gameplay mechanics, but there is still room for some more content, I think it would be nice to be able to have a picture in my mind of the potential style of *Fly Music*. Something on the story, or perhaps a unique and interesting art style choice, something stylistically that compliments the gameplay.

Boss fights are mentioned almost in passing; if they aren't anything special, don't bother mentioning them. However, in these types of games, the boss battles are often the highlight of the game. It would be awesome if the boss fights could introduce some new mechanics to the fairly standard gameplay; especially if the new mechanics were unique and music based.

"Fly Music is much like your standard vertical scrolling shooter, except that it attempts to enhance the user experience by adjusting the difficulty for a user on the fly. In other words, the game has a modular difficulty that attempts to achieve the correct challenge level for any given user's skill level."

That paragraph needs to be adjusted; as it stands, it makes it sound like the game auto-adjusts the difficulty, presumably based on how well the player is doing since that is how the majority of games with adaptive difficulty handle it. Later on the Treatment begins to detail exactly how the difficulty is adjusted, which sounds much cooler than that opening paragraph would have the reader believe. Hell, the Treatment could probably do well enough without that paragraph.

The presentation overall was very solid; there weren't any sections that pulled me out of the read and it seemed to flow well enough. Spelling and grammar were equally solid; just a few minor issues here and there. The header and footer sections were nice; the sub-title could use some help though, this short sentence should capture the essence of the game or otherwise be memorable somehow.

Fun: B+
Presentation: A
Originality: B

Kaiser Says:

Title: Fly Music

Written by: rkcr

Week # 1

High Concept: I don't know how welcoming I'd be about a gaming being "standard", which kind of implies, to me, that it's a big generic. However, the next sentence seems to

imply that it's more than standard, which is a good thing. A shooter that relies on music definitely has my attention.

Critique: The first thing I noticed was that the difficulty will be dynamic rather than an option you choose before beginning. I get a huge kick out of that for sure, and I like that it's not pigeonholed to fast music = harder game. I think a game like this would have an interesting layer for players with a competitive streak. It would be interesting to sit down and figure out what combinations of speed, complexity, and power would net the best scores with the fewest headaches.

Additionally, I greatly appreciate the allowance of decreasing the difficulty if a player gets in over their head. This makes the game much more accessible for new players, and it helps get rid of the wall of "normal is doable, hard is impossible". It's good to see a concept that's both rewarding for skilled players, and accessible to new players.

Overall, I think this is a good concept that has the potential of being something extremely interesting. I wouldn't be so quick with labeling it as a "standard shooter", especially when the rest of the treatment goes on to describe something fresh. It may not break the mold of a shooter to a great extent, but it does add some elements to a genre that is generally extremely unforgiving to new players. As far as the integration of the music into the game, it may not be *huge*, but it certainly helps the player get a feel for how hard they should be trying. People who are in the room and aren't really watching get a good idea of when "that hard part" is coming up, too. I like that.

Fun: A
Presentation: A-
Originality: B+