

Fight Songs

By hooking up bands—from Outkast to the Stooges—with video games, Tim Riley's made arrested development pay *by Robert Ito*

IF HEAVEN WERE DESIGNED by a 16-year-old boy, it would probably look a lot like Tim Riley's office. Video games, Spider-Man comics, and bins brimming with the latest metal and hip-hop CDs litter the floor. A Tony Hawk skateboard—signed—hangs on the wall. There is a mini fridge filled with nothing but Red Bull and an MTV Video Music Awards moon man near one of three computer monitors.

Riley is the worldwide executive of music at Activision, the Santa Monica-based company that netted nearly a billion dollars last year producing video games like *X-Men Legends* and *Call of Duty: Finest Hour*. All those games need music, and it is Riley's job to find just the right tune to accompany a frolic through the underwater metropolis of Reef City (*Shark Tale*) or a guns-blazing assault on the 405 (*True Crime: Streets of LA*). Riley listens to CDs all day—he considers between 500 and 1,000 songs for an average game—then checks out new bands at the Viper Room and Spaceland at night.

It's a tough job. What exactly is the perfect soundtrack for, say, skateboarding? Or hunting ghosts? Like the film directors who married surfing with driving guitars and reverb, or spy thrillers with booming Lalo Schiffrin scores, Riley is creating soundtracks for an entirely new generation. On Tony Hawk's *Underground 2*,

CONTROL PANEL:
Activision's worldwide
executive of music,
Tim Riley



he introduced young gamers to singers their parents liked (Frank Sinatra, Johnny Cash), bands they might not have liked (the Ramones, X), and classics you damn well better like ("Rapper's Delight," "Break On Through to the Other Side"). With full symphonic scores and dozens of licensed music tracks, video games are actually better than a lot of film soundtrack CDs—plus you get to keep the game.

Riley is in his office with Brian Pass, the producer of *Ultimate Spider-Man*, which is due for release later this year. Both are in faded jeans and sneakers; Riley is wearing a black T-shirt from the Brig, a bar in Venice. Pass is here to show Riley an early version of the game and to listen to a few soundtrack possibilities. A moment before, they were discussing meetings and deadlines; now Pass is fiddling with an Xbox controller, explaining how he—he, meaning *Spider-Man*—is going to rescue a screaming woman who is trapped underneath a burning car. "I have to come over here and punch out the fire hydrant, which puts out the fire. Oh, but see, now she's

ARTIFACT

Keep It Clean

A new mural takes on the dirty business of oil disposal

LOS ANGELES MURAL ARTISTS have explored subjects as far-reaching as God, football, and the hazards of firing guns on New Year's Eve, but Rich Raya of Mount Washington has broken new ground with his 75-foot-long work about the sin and salvation of recycled motor oil. The tableau—on a wall overlooking the Pep Boys parking lot in Highland Park—features an environmentally friendly depiction of the local classic truck and auto show. The work is framed by two enormous hands, one of them holding a picture of a river awash in dumped oil, the other a clean and optimistic neighborhood that has disposed of it properly. "The mural is not on the street—it's in the parking lot," Raya said wistfully at the mural's unveiling. Yes, but given the number of junkers routinely being tinkered with in your average auto supply store parking lot, he couldn't have targeted his audience better. —*Ed Leibowitz*



▶ drowning, so I've got to jump in there and pull the car off of her."

Pass saves the woman, then tires out the Green Goblin by tricking him into hurling all of his fireballs. Riley wonders what kind of music goes with a high-speed, high-altitude tour of downtown punctuated by frequent brawls. "When you're swinging through the city, I think we're looking for a more orchestral kind of thing," he says. "Then when you're in the boss battle"—gamespeak for the big fight with the main villain—"it will transition into something poppy or maybe some industrial, heavy guitar stuff."

Riley cues up a track that sounds like something from Arnold Schwarzenegger's 1984 sword-and-sorcery epic *Conan the Destroyer*, all minor chords and big bass beats. Boom-boom-boom-BOOM, boom-boom-boom-BOOM. "This might be good for the dark stuff," he says. They toss around the idea of digitizing actual band members for a big bar scene, where the musicians play in a wire mesh cage to protect them from flying beer bottles. Riley has a couple of groups in mind—one is an established act, the other is "the next Metallica." The younger band seems to have the advantage here, being more popular "for our demo" and cheaper to license. He plays a track. "I would feel like battling against somebody with this going on in the background," he says.

As gatekeeper to some of the gaming world's most lucrative franchises, Riley wields enormous power. Games have become such a huge industry—with \$9.9 billion in sales last year, it's bigger than Hollywood, although both have become intertwined—that just about every major label has a person whose job is licensing songs for video games. Andie Brokaw is that person at Warner Bros. Records. With the typical kid playing a single sports video game for a total of 50 hours, getting a song into a popular game is like mainlining music into a young child's skull. "It's amazing to get a song played in a sports stadium," she says, "but you're going to reach a lot more kids if you're in Grand Theft Auto." Riley agrees. "Everybody wants to be in a video game," he says. "Especially with newer bands, video games have become almost a form of radio." **LA**

Like a Virgin

There really is something about Mary *by Natalie Finn*

LAST NOVEMBER, ONLINE CASINO GoldenPalace.com paid \$28,000 on eBay for a ten-year-old grilled cheese sandwich supposedly seared with the likeness of the Virgin Mary. The much-hyped lunchtime staple came to Venice Beach last month as part of a promotion for the World Grilled Cheese Eating Championship. The first Virgin Mary sighting authenticated by the Catholic Church was in 1531, in Guadalupe, Mexico. "Very, very few [sightings] have been authenticated," says Tod Tamberg, media relations director for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles. "I would think that the Blessed Mother would have better things to do." Still, there has been no shortage of locally reported brushes. Here's a sampling.

Since the mid-'80s, hundreds of miracle seekers have flocked to the Mojave Desert on the 13th of each month hoping to catch a glimpse of the Virgin Mary's image in the night sky. Our Lady reportedly chooses to manifest herself as a bright blip of white light. The woman who originated these sojourns reportedly first saw a vision near her Pacoima home.

At least nine people have given written testimony that on June 24, 1989, they witnessed a Virgin Mary apparition at their friend's Pasadena home, where she reportedly appeared, in great detail, hovering above the man's apartment balcony.

In the late '80s, people gathered over many nights to see a shadowy outline of the Virgin Mary that appeared on the garage door of a home in Long Beach. The not-so-immaculate source: dead bugs trapped in a neighbor's outdoor light.

A former priest drew people to his North Hollywood home in the early '90s to see a backyard tree that had fungus on it that formed the Virgin Mary's outline.

On December 8, 1992, a Montclair woman reported seeing a luminous cross created by moonlight on her bathroom window. She saw the Virgin Mary and her entourage—a host of angels—appear in the cross's center. She said that the vision returned every month during the full moon for at least three years.

A Los Angeles man claimed to have a Virgin Mary-shaped bee sting rash on his back on June 4, 2004. Holysightings.com didn't know whether the man ever tried to steal honey again.

