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17 A journey into the Commodore 64 demoscene of today

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A journey into the Commodore 64 demoscene of today

Hugi takes a look on the current state of the Commodore 64 demoscene, which has turned 25 years old.

Written by Jazzcat & Magic

Prologue

In August 2007 the Commodore 64 turned 25 years old since its first introduction. That's right, the Commodore 64 was first introduced in August 1982. Has it been that long already? It sure has! Being the best-selling personal computer model of all times the Commodore 64 is also credited with popularizing the computer demoscene. (Source: Wikipedia) And I agree on this fully. Hugi contacted Jazzcat of Onslaught who is the main-editor of Vandalism News. Vandalism News is one of the oldest and best diskmag still being released on the Commodore 64. Together with Jazzcat we will go on a journey to take a look on the current state of the Commodore 64 demoscene. What recent productions or parties have made a difference? What websites shape the Commodore 64 demoscene of today? Of course we will discuss Vandalism News and we will even try to take a look on the future of the Commodore 64 demoscene.

Introducing Jazzcat: "My name is David. I was born in Australia and have lived there my whole life. I work in one of Australia's largest companies as a Technical Advisor; have been there for quite a few years now. In the scene my handle is Jazzcat and I'm a member of the group Onslaught. I was also in some other crews like Legend, Alpha Flight 1970, Rebels and Demonix. Interestingly I began my relationship with the scene in a more obscure way than the usual scener, as Hacker/Phreaker. Of course I started playing games to begin with, but soon started meddling with other things, conferences, systems, boards and calls to foreign countries to people with similar interests was fascinating for me (late 1980s). I started swapping and progressed to the status of Mega-Swapper (200+ contacts). Due to my connections with the English game companies I soon became a very popular Original Supplier (supplying in excess of 200 'first release' originals); this was perhaps my second most important role as a member of a cracking group (the first being H/P and supplying my group 'calling codes', of course). The other main tasks I have performed is organiser (Public Relations and Management), Magazine Editor (Wetworks, Vandalism, Domination, The Pulse, Scene+, Driven and now my new magazine called Recollection), co-sysop of "Down By Law", "The Pirate Island", "Deadzone", "Sanitarium" and several other C64 bulletin boards. Also HTML-slave with updates to scene sites on the internet (www.onslaughters.org and mags.c64.org) and graphician (did quite a lot of graphics in my younger days, including around 6 or so 'disk covers')."



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An insight on the current Commodore 64 demoscene and its releases

As mentioned earlier it is 25 years ago that the first Commodore 64 has been sold and thus started to create an immense sub-culture, the demoscene. After 25 years there are still great productions being released on the good old Commodore 64. How does Jazzcat see today's demoscene? Jazzcat explains: "This question certainly could spark an answer that would take up many chapters based on the psychological, sociological, cultural or ideological aspects of the demo scene. However, getting to the crux of the question, the demo scene is still alive; it's still transforming and moving away from traditional demo styles. In 2007 we still have productions from Crest, Oxyron, Booze Design, Focus, Fairlight, Triad and many big names as well as new and exciting groups/productions. These groups/productions arrive to our screens mainly from Sweden and Germany, but as you know, the C64 has established itself all over the world." He continues: "In the last two years the most influential productions I would list are:

Desert Dreams: great(est) remake on C64!

The Wild Bunch: as hard as diamonds, as sophisticated as champagne and as cool as a pistol barrel.

Trans*Form: it plays with my mind and does so in a very well designed way, which is a fresh and radical approach in the world of C64 demos.

Artefacts: well implemented concept within the restrictions of 4K only!

Timanthes: this Windows tool gave "artists" much needed inspiration.

Mortalis Arisen: good movement between parts.

Star Flake: the most productive musician on C64 shows off!

Deep 90%: intimate collection of graphics by one of Hungary's finest!

Tsunami: those guys in Booze Design continue to improve, Dane is at his best here!

Keep in mind the key word is influential in this list. I've missed some titles for sure, but these ones come to mind without looking into the question further."



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The Commodore 64 demoscene on the internet!

Today's demoscene is depending on the internet. The demoscene communicates for example through e-mail, irc or skype. We download the productions we have a need for at various places. Communities are built through different websites. What websites are the cornerstones of the Commodore 64 demoscene of today? Jazzcat tells us:

"For any insider or outsider, you cannot go past:" The C64 Portal - <http://c64.sk> - this is a great site for C64 and C64 scene news and has been online for over 5 years now.

The C64 Scene Database - <http://noname.c64.org/csdb> - A site dedicated to gathering as much information as possible about the productions, the groups, the sceners and the events in the C64 scene.

COCOS - <http://c64.cc> - Cocos is your one stop listing resource for Commodore 64 related websites.

The Digital Dungeon - <ftp://ftp.scs-trc.net/pub/c64/> - The main FTP resource, up and running since 1994.

"Also, I can't dismiss this selfish opportunity to give some plugs for my own websites, which are quite known too (I hope)."

<http://mags.c64.org> - the largest archive of C64 scene disk and paper magazines. HUGE!

<http://recollection.c64.org> - the home of the Recollection magazine. REAL oldschool!

<http://www.onslaughters.org> - the group site of my group, ONSLAUGHT.

Jazzcat about Vandalism News...

Every scene has its diskmag... Most known on the PC are Imphobia, Pain, Hugi and now also Zine. On the Amiga RAW, ROM, Upstream, Generation for sure have left their marks in demoscene history. On the Commodore 64, based on what I have been told and I have seen for myself, Vandalism News can be easily put in this list. Jazzcat comments: "Vandalism News is now the only real scene magazine left on the Commodore 64. Started in 1991, the mag is approaching its 50th issue. There once were many magazines on the C64, perhaps too many, nowadays Vandalism News holds the flame of C64 journalism and continues the disk magazine legacy on C64. The C64 market has changed so much since 1991 and Vandalism has followed it all the way, nowadays the magazine is dominated by legal news (demos and parties), which is a reflection of current scene affairs. The great thing about this magazine is that it has a spirit that cannot be captured or imitated by 'online content' and its reputation as a reliable source speaks for itself."



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Vandalism news is around since 16-17 years now and still it's being released. I ask Jazzcat about the production process of vandalism news. Please describe the making of... Jazzcat: " Each issue of Vandalism News take some time to produce and the way that we produce the magazine has changed over the years. These days it normally takes around 4-8 months to produce, sometimes more, sometimes less; depending on what type of issue we're aiming for (e.g. the current production, Vandalism News 50 - Gold Edition, is taking considerable time to produce). Firstly, I send a tender of interest to musicians to compose exclusive music for the magazine (Vandalism settles for nothing less than exclusive contributions). Around the same time I'm cracking the whip over the backs of those behind the 'intro sequence' and magazine graphic. The reason the music, intro and outfit are organised _first_ is simply because they take the _longest_ to complete, especially the intro. With these things started I then ask a few guys for some guest appearances (e.g. party reports and opinionated articles) and then Macx will organise his contribution (Interview and Awards chapters). Our partners in Wrath Designs are approached for text towards the end of organising, as I like to get their text nice and fresh, straight from the disk drive... One of the important elements of organising is to get multiple things on the go at once; if you pause too much you can easily fall behind. Main aspects of organising include, but aren't limited to: E-Mail and IRC (organising), Emulator (Packing) and Real Hardware (testing). Text is submitted in notepad and then converted using a nice ascii/petscii conversion program (this little tool saves a LOT of time; I used to receive articles in snail-mail years ago and have to type them up manually). The final things that are done for the magazine are the Editorial, News and Backpage chapters and then final packing/testing of the product. As a side note to your question; the Awards chapter (which replaces the traditional Charts chapter) is the most gruelling part of the magazine to complete, we work quite hard on making it as entertaining and thorough as possible."

Commodore 64 demoscene - Miscellaneous

In this paragraph we will discuss the mother of all Commodore 64 parties called 'X', the comeback of old sceners on the Commodore 64 demoscene and the remakes of pc/amiga demos on the Commodore 64. In Hugi issue 33 we had a report of X 2006. The X party is held every two years in the Netherlands. Jazzcat comments: "I've monitored all the X parties (through my magazine Domination and also Vandalism News where we print the full reports, results and reactions), but I've only had the pleasure of attending one of the events, which was X'2004. The atmosphere there is pure scene - everyone is dedicated to only one platform - the C64, this makes it special compared to other parties which are 'impersonal', too many people, too many platforms. During the X event you can meet with living legends, old friends, new guys etc., free beer, free meals, and live performances by legends like Jeroen Tel/Maniacs of Noise. The last party in 2006 even had a stripper! Excellent atmosphere, friendly sceners and great releases/compos. Make sure you can make it to the next one in 2008! Rural Netherlands is the shit!" Scene legends performing or making a comeback is always a great thing for a demoscene. On the PC a legendary group returned after 13 years called Andromeda. We asked Jazzcat if many oldtimers return to their Commodore 64 roots. Jazzcat: "There are some oldtimers returning, some examples would be legendary coder Pernod/Horizon (who helped with 'The Wild Bunch' demo), next up is Bizzmo/Genesis*Project, who found his way back to C64 and pixeling again, another that came back to us is Mirage/Focus (who never really left), but had a flurry of graphical activity. Slammer/Camelot is another comeback story, giving us some great productions (but working in the background, so you never see him but he is always there), will we see another big demo from him like Tower Power? The Ignorance/X-Ray came back to C64 and is doing some high quality cracks under the NOSTALGIA label. The Sarge and Jeroen Tel are credited for some unreleased work in the Let's Scroll It demo. Who will it be next!?" Not only old sceners have made their comeback. Demos can have their comeback to.



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Released in the past on PC or Amiga it's challenging to remake them on the system limits of the Commodore 64. A good thing or not? Jazzcat: "Yes, definitely a good thing, as long as effort is put in with a C64 touch ('Desert Dreams'-remake, features great code, music and artwork. Some screens were amazing, even by 2007-standards, despite the fact that most of the demo is parts are based in the 1990s). I certainly encourage people to make a remake, but then the deeper question needs to be asked, isn't everything copied in one way or another anyway? (Even kings have said for instance, that the portraits were excellent but for what reason?)"

The Future of the Commodore 64 scene

While the Commodore 64 demoscene is still going strong (or so it seems) Hugi wondered how a possible near and long future would look like for the scene on the Commodore 64. As most scenes the average age of a demoscener has gone up tremendously. Which means less free time per scener to spend on our fabulous hobby, or for some even lifestyle. We asked Jazzcat, who is around for quite some time now on the C-64 to give his predictions on the future. Will the c-64 scene grow bigger or smaller? And in what directions can a c-64 demo still be improved? Jazzcat: "I don't think it will grow smaller. People are leaving and coming all the time but the actual feeling of numbers in the scene seems to have remained stable for a couple of years now. In the next 10 years is more difficult to say, I think there will still be a scene then but how healthy it is I can't say (it will mostly certainly be internet/emulator-based, which is almost what it's like at the moment anyway, real hardware/disks by then will have deteriorated even more). Another angle to this question is to look at the past. In the USA the scene was dying around 1989/1990 and in Europe in 1992/1993 (when the commercial side of C= departed to other platforms). Back then people said it wouldn't last; people would abandon a dead machine and move on, how wrong they were! Without being specific to anything in particular I can safely say that everything can always be better. There are tons of unexplored concepts. The movement outside structural borders of C64 demo design is slowly paced, however it is always moving and now and then something just smashes the boundaries completely. Some routines get reinvented, new world records are achieved, but most importantly people continue to think up new ways at presenting new and old concepts."

Epilogue

Hugi takes this opportunity to congratulate the c-64 community with its 25th birthday! On to another 25 years uh? We hope that this article has been a good read for non-c64 sceners but also for those who are a part of the Commodore 64 community. We end this article with a special message from Jazzcat: "Look forward to Vandalism Gold (50th edition featuring new outfit! and inspired text, dedicated to our lost friend (R.I.P): Derbyshire Ram) and Recollection 3 (the continued documentation of the way things were, legends contribute and show the new generation how things came to be). Both these magazines should be out sometime this year (with luck on my side). I would like to send greetings to you C64-data-freaks; especially all those I met personally and of course special salutes to my fellow group members! Good luck with Hugi!" And Hugi thanks Jazzcat for his cooperation on this article. Good luck with the 50th issue of Vandalism News!



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