



In order to help its graduates take advantage of the growing opportunities for audio production in video games, The Conservatory of Recording Arts and Sciences selects Wwise for its new curriculum.

Education for the Future of Audio Production for Games

Alexandra Pasian

The Conservatory of Recording Arts and Sciences in Tempe, Arizona, concentrates on providing its students with a thorough education in audio. From live sound and recording to post-production and business practices, students attending The Conservatory receive an audio-focused education designed to make them employable in the music discipline of their choice.

In September of 2006, The Conservatory began offering a 3-week course on audio production for video games. At the centre of this course is Wwise®, Audiokinetic's pipeline solution.

Audio for Games at the Conservatory

The decision to add audio for games to the Conservatory's curriculum was based on the increased opportunities for its graduates. As Conservatory instructor Michel Henein points out to his students in their first class, the U.S. game market, in 2006, saw \$7.3 billion in software sales.

Says Henein, "As the industry matures, games are going to become an even bigger part of our lives. We're now seeing the next-generation craze with PS3, Wii, and Xbox 360, and, with that, even bigger opportunities in the industry are coming. It's very exciting."

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—*Michel Henein, Instructor, The Conservatory*

Henein is a veteran of the music, film, and gaming industries. He began as an assistant music editor in Academy Award® winning composer Hans Zimmer's studio and recently worked on Pixar's "Cars" and the "MX Unleashed" game series. He started teaching and consulting at the Conservatory in 2006 and was asked to help develop an audio for games curriculum by Kevin Becka, Director of Education at the Conservatory. Henein suggested that the school use Wwise in the classroom and collaborated with Conservatory instructor Robert Brock on the program.

Selecting Wwise

Henein encountered Wwise at GCD 2006. During his initial demo, he thought "here is the tool I've been longing for for years" and has since come to believe that "Wwise is the first real universal tool that allows students and professionals to work with sound using a very robust pipeline."

Becka had already heard about Wwise when Henein suggested it to him and, like Henein, was also impressed. For this recording engineer who has worked with the likes of Kenny G, Quincy Jones, and, more recently, George Benson and who is also Technical Editor at Mix Magazine USA, Wwise represents a significant step forward in audio production for video games.

Wwise®

audio pipeline solution

Says Becka, "In audio production, when you make a record, you use software that has been around for at least 15 years and hardware that has been in existence for even longer than that. But everyone in audio for video games was pretty much doing their own thing. There was no universal application." That is, until now.

To describe what Wwise has done for audio production in the gaming industry, Becka compares it to the film industry of the 20s and 30s. "Prior to Wwise, making audio for video games was very much like trying to make a movie by creating your own film stock and grinding your own lens."

According to Becka, "For us, Wwise was a natural choice. We called Audiokinetic, and they were very enthusiastic. They offered us access to the program for the curriculum, and we immediately bought 26 laptops so that each student could run Wwise. The whole thing came together in about 4 months."



The Benefits of Wwise

Although the Conservatory has been offering audio for video games for just one semester, Henein already sees great potential employment for his students. Says Henein, "As game companies embrace Wwise, our graduates will be able to use their knowledge and experience to work for leading game producers in-house or as freelance audio experts. It's an exciting time to be a student, and we're seeing tremendous opportunity with the Wwise application for our students to go out there in the industry and use it to great success."

Henein is confident that the industry will embrace Wwise, and he is very specific about the reasons why. In the first place, says Henein, "Wwise has a User Interface that makes sense. There is a bit of a learning curve to most new technologies, but, once you step in and learn the philosophy of Wwise, it's very, very user friendly."

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—**Michel Henein**, *Instructor, The Conservatory*

Secondly, Henein says "The fact that it is designed to be tightly integrated with an actual game engine in order to allow you to receive feedback on your changes in real time is also really powerful."

And, finally, Henein states that, "Whereas in the past it could take weeks or months to do very basic things because you had to deal with programmers who were busy with other things, using Wwise means that you can add game features in a fraction of the time. With Wwise, a lot of that basic work is already completed for you because Audiokinetic has done the hard work of anticipating what subtleties sound designers are looking for."

Opportunities for the Future

With the expansion of the video game industry and the potential for increased sound complexity with next generation consoles, the future for audio production in games sounds good indeed. In offering this new curriculum, the Conservatory is putting their students in the best position possible to take advantage of these new opportunities.

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—**Kevin Becka**, *Director of Education, The Conservatory*

There is little doubt that graduates from the Conservatory will lead the way in audio production for video games. Says Becka, "Our students will be able to take all of the skills they have learned at the Conservatory, in terms of recording and editing, and apply these to audio production for video games using Wwise. I think that the students who learn to use Wwise here will take their passion and what they have learned into the industry."

He concludes that "Wwise is a very forward thinking and visionary application that will ultimately help Conservatory graduates and game companies achieve a higher level of immersive realism in audio production."

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