Pedro Eustache opens up about video game music and becoming the Flute Guy



Pedro Eustache has played just about every woodwind or reed-based instrument in the world. He has amassed a collection of truly unique instruments made by nature and his very own hand, including flutes made from everything from flower pots to ostrich eggs. He owns plenty of flutes, either cobbled together from different instruments or modified to create wholly original sounds that only he can produce after decades of study that took him all over the world. His viral moment at The Game Awards, for which he is now lovingly known as Flute Guy, is not his breakthrough moment but is rather just another blessing in what he describes as a divinely ordained calling for a career that almost did not happen.

One of the first things Eustache said to me in a recent interview over Zoom, which really captured his prolific love and exacting standards for his art, was a gentle correction and an apology. He was surrounded in his home studio by his

many flutes, including the bass flute that brought him his viral moment — critically not the alto flute I called it in my earlier blog about Eustache (*The Verge* regrets the error).

As for his apology, that night, Eustache played several flutes, including one he modified for ease of use — it can get tough on the arms to hold a standard flute perpendicular to the face for extended periods — and for the specific sound that modification makes. The arrangement he played, a melody of all the themes of the games up for Game of the Year, featured music from *Xenoblade Chronicles 3* — a game that prominently features a Japanese flute in gameplay.

“So in one part of the arrangement, it was very specific for me to play this [flute],” he told me, holding up his modified flute. “And I’m so ignorant that I found out that the original instrument from the game is a shinobue, and I have two of them! Next time, I’m going to play this Japanese shinobue. I beg forgiveness for all the *Xenoblade* gamers. I will do them honor next time.”

And there will indeed be a next time. After his incredible moment took off on social media, Game Awards maestro Geoff Keighley tweeted that he will bring Eustache back for Keighley’s next event in June, ostensibly the annual Summer Game Fest.

Eustache has actually performed in The Game Awards’ orchestra since 2017 and has been performing on video game soundtracks for much longer. Given his history, I asked what, if any, games he has played.

“Gosh, this is so embarrassing. But I cannot but speak the truth. I hope they don’t mind me,” he demurred. “I come from a generation in which my video games are me playing my instruments and playing music deep into my craft. I might be the only dinosaur in the whole history of humanity that doesn’t play video games.”

Rest assured, I told him he was not.

“I come from a generation in which my video games are me playing my instruments.”

He further explained that it’s a good thing he hasn’t gotten into games because if he applied the same joyful obsessiveness he has with his music to gaming, he’d descend into a “rabbit hole” from which he’d never emerge. “I can see that the music of many [games] is so incredible, so epic, that if I start going from what I hear to get tempted into [playing] them, I don’t think I would have a life.”

However, over the years of performing video game music, there are games that stand out. “*Horizon* is incredible. *Xenoblad*e is fantastic,” he said. “*Genshin Impact*, the *music* on that.”

He’s performed as the principal soloist in the *Genshin Impact* concert. When *League of Legends* introduced the hero K’sante, Eustache played the flute you hear at the beginning of his intro cinematic.

Beyond his video game work, Eustache has contributed to many projects in other media. He’s worked with Ramin Djawadi on *Game of Thrones’* live concert tour. He’s performed on many movie soundtracks, including playing a 21-foot-long horn and a massive duduk – an Armenian instrument – that he made himself for Hans Zimmer’s Oscar award-winning *Dune* soundtrack.

Given his wide sampling of genres and media, I asked if there was a difference between music for video games and music for other media, and his answer explained why he’s now found himself at the center of one of the most wholesome video game moments of the last year. “Music is music,” he said simply. “It’s very cliche but so true.”

He professed his love of Duke Ellington – who he called America’s Mozart – and shared that Ellington had a similar question asked of him. “And he said there’s only two kinds of

music: good music and bad music.”

“If there’s good music,” he continued, “I play and I respond the way I did at The Game Awards.”

He wasn’t instructed to perform like that. He wasn’t coached. He didn’t ask to be put where cameras could see him but was placed there by the conductor, Peter Rotter, because he knew what we all now know about Eustache. “And Peter says, ‘Pedro, you have this thing, you have this energy, that I want people to see.’”

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Energy that manifested even within the interview itself when, unprompted, Eustache whipped out his bass flute and played the passage from that special moment full of that same wonderful, infectious energy.

“When I first heard the arrangement of this medley. I feel like a fish in the water,” he said. “I was like, ‘I’m gonna ride this thing from here to the moon.’”

You can feel his enthusiasm for the music even when he’s simply talking about it. Playing music like that, he explained, isn’t something that he does, but rather he feels like a conduit for something greater.

“I am a passenger in a vehicle that the Creator is piloting.”

Faith plays a big role in Eustache’s life and informs everything he does and how he does it. “I worked very, very, very, very hard practicing in studying acoustics, my instrument, going to India to study, going to China, studying in Armenia, to all these places. […] I work so hard to make sure I can get out of the way and be the least possible obstacle for the Creator to do his thing through me.”

And in the most vulnerable moment of the interview, he shared

with me how that came to be. Pedro Eustache got his love of music from his very DNA. He was born in Venezuela to a Haitian father and a Venezuelan mother, inheriting the deep musical richness of Black and Latinx cultures. He came to the flute through his brother, Michel Eustache, who told him, when he chafed at the idea of playing classical violin, that he didn't have to play the violin but he had to play something.

"I am a passenger in a vehicle that the Creator is piloting."

"You are going to choose something to play," Eustache's brother told him. "Because you're good at this. I'm not going to let you off the hook."

With his brother's mentorship and his mother's wisdom, Eustache became the solo principal flute player for the Simón Bolívar Orchestra. From that, he was able to study music in Paris, where his mind was creatively blown.

"When I got to Paris, I discovered Ravi Shankar and Indian music. I discovered [music from] West Africa. I discovered Arabic music and Japanese music, and those things kept my sanity because practicing in the rigid system of Western classical music almost drove me nuts."

After returning to Venezuela, he started studying jazz which led him to earning a scholarship to attend the California Institute of the Arts. So Eustache, with his wife and daughter, moved to LA. And within 30 days of arriving, with the hope that a life in the States would bring peace, prosperity and, most crucially, health to his critically ill daughter, she passed away. "I almost lost my mind," he said of his grief. "We came very close to committing suicide."

But there came a moment that changed him. "We felt the incredible hand of God bringing us back from that horrible, dark, monstrous place."

From then on, he approached everything – all the performances

of his long and distinguished career, from performing with Sir Paul McCartney to his career playing with Yanni, right down to just performing video game music — with an indefatigable zeal.

“To be able to thrive after that. To be alive. To know that we will meet her again and we’ll spend eternity together. That joy that I cannot put in words,” he said softly, reflectively, before his energy returned with the force of a supernova. “So when they put music like this in front of me, I kill, I just *kill*. Because I know where I came from. I know where I have been rescued from.”

Above all, he wanted to share that story. That his incredible performance came from a place born of immense tragedy that in turn birthed immense joy and that such joy isn’t his alone.

“This, what I have? Is not exclusive to me,” he said.

Pedro Eustache, who’ll now be forever known as Flute Guy, wants you to be blessed.

“What you guys saw in me last Thursday, I believe there’s an author and a source for that. And I would bless you to search, find it, develop it, and exercise it for your own amazing blessing and for a profound impact in society.”

With that performance and his incredible and unique openness and enthusiasm, we are.

https://www.theverge.com/2022/12/13/23507234/flute-guy-pedro-eustache-interview-the-game-awards