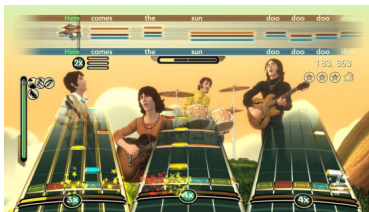


Gamer Battle of the Bands: “Rock Band” Vs. “Guitar Hero”

Written by Luke Hamilton

Tuesday, 22 September 2009 15:24

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With three *Rock Band* titles and a whopping 11 *Guitar Hero* titles that have popped up in the past four years, plus another three coming before the end of the year, figuring out a starting point or must-buys for the music-simulation genre can be overwhelming. With *Guitar Hero 5* and *The Beatles: Rock Band* released earlier this month, this is an excellent time to evaluate what's available.

In 2005, *Guitar Hero* was released on PlayStation 2 packaged with a plastic guitar controller. Many games have had peripheral controllers, but this one exploded. The idea of playing guitar in a video game appealed to a massive crowd of casual and hardcore gamers alike, and why not? It could be easy or challenging depending on the difficulty level you set, but most importantly, it's the same concept as jamming out to music on the radio, except *you* get to be the rock star.

Skip ahead to 2007, when *Rock Band* emerged to challenge *Guitar Hero's* dominance of the

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genre.

Rock Band

added a microphone for vocals (similar to karaoke games) and a new instrument that duplicated the appeal of

Guitar Hero

: the drums. It was also designed to use these instruments plus two guitars at once, delivering a band simulation for four players and becoming an intoxicating party experience for casual players, with a "Tour Mode" that gave the dedicated motivation to play for hours on end, building up money and fame for online rankings.

Today, both series now employ a full band and highlight rock, metal, alternative, and even country music. Online play for both allows people to form bands with players in different locations, or compete in band battles. Players can create their own characters, and a "no fail" mode gives beginners an easy way to play through any song. (I like to think of it as a musical version of tee ball.)

Playing songs in either game is the same, as you match your strumming/drumming with the notes sliding forward. Both also have score-boosting "star power." Even the instruments are interchangeable. The only major difference between *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* is the songs.



Both series have strong annual titles, with track lists averaging more than 80 songs from diverse artists along with new bells and whistles such as *Guitar Hero 5's* "jump in" feature, with which extra players can join a song at any time. You can also hop online with your system and download new single tracks for about \$2 each, along with packaged songs for a discounted price.

The annual games also include a feature to download tracks from the previous games. There's a fee of around \$5 for a set number of compatible songs, but the convenience of having the majority of songs all on one title makes up for it in my eyes. *Rock Band 2* at \$49.95 is the best value so far, including 84 songs and a download voucher for 20 more, with 55 songs from the

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original

Rock Band

that can be transferred for \$5. (The

Rock Band

game disc is required for the transfer but can be rented for a night.)

Guitar Hero releases the majority of new songs on discs themed around specific artists, but they suffer from a rehashed design and a lack of variety compared to the annual titles. With smaller song lists (averaging 40 songs) - all but roughly a dozen from one artist - but the same \$60 retail price as the annual game, these have limited appeal. Perhaps the most questionable release is *Guitar Hero Smash Hits*, a collection of 48 songs from the older *Guitar Hero*

games redone with full-band accessibility. Paying \$60 for literally the same songs comes off as a low blow, but if you want to play them with the full band, it's the only way.

Rock Band releases the majority of new songs as downloadable tracks, with more than 1,000 songs to date compared to *Guitar Hero's* 250 to 300 songs. The catch is that if you spend \$60 on downloaded songs, you don't get as many tracks as you would on a *Guitar Hero*

disc, plus there's no resale value because it's all digital. For offline *Rock Band* fans, there have been several "track pack" retail releases, bundling 20 songs from the download catalog for \$30 each.

Rock Band recently released its first band-themed disc with The Beatles. Going a different route from *Guitar Hero's* themed discs, *The Beatles: Rock Band* has nothing *but* Beatles songs on it, as well as a new feature with three singers harmonizing on separate microphones. (The entire Beatles catalog will eventually be released as downloadable add-on tracks.) I'm personally weary of music titles with songs from only one band, but The Beatles have such a massive catalog of good songs that this might work out.

You really can't go wrong with either *Rock Band* or *Guitar Hero*, but if you become a fan of these games, it can get expensive fast with new controllers and songs.

Beatles

wins on quality, with songs from one of the best bands ever, while

Guitar Hero 5

wins on value with more songs, greater song variety, and options to form any group style you want - such as a band of four drummers.

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If you haven't indulged in the music games yet, you can go to any pre-owned-game store and get a couple of the older titles along with a guitar controller for about half the price of one of the new ones, but including all the fun.

Guitar Hero 5 is now available on Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and Wii for \$59.95 and \$99.95 bundled with a guitar controller. The Beatles: Rock Band is now available on Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and Wii for \$59.95 and \$159.99 bundled with a guitar controller, drum set, and microphone. For this article, the author played games in both series.

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