

Bands catching rhythm of music videogames

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Guitar Hero is demonstrated at the E3 Expo in Los Angeles. Videogames are getting their groove on with a collection of new music titles, as bands including the legendary Beatles are won over to a new platform for selling their songs

Videogames are getting their groove on with a collection of new music titles, as bands including the legendary Beatles are won over to a new platform for selling their songs.

The big three videogame console makers and top third-party publishers are showing off their latest titles aimed at fulfilling a seemingly ubiquitous fantasy of being a rock star.

The two surviving original Beatles, Sir Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr, appeared for a "Rock Band" videogame debut at the [Electronic Entertainment Expo](#), or E3, that wraps up Thursday in Los Angeles.

The addition of the legendary 1960s group to the "Rock Band" roster is expected to heighten the success of a [blockbuster](#) franchise, as well as fuel a trend for bands to distribute songs and gain fans through videogames.

"The Beatles are going to bring a whole new audience into [music](#) gaming," said John Drake of MTV Games, as he let an AFP reporter Wednesday test the new videogame. "I think it is good for music gaming overall."

The "Rock Band" franchise has racked up more than one billion dollars (US) in sales since it launched in 2007, according to MTV Games.

Game revenue includes money from approximately 45 million songs downloaded on the internet by players, who then use controllers shaped like guitars, drums, or microphones to pretend to be band members.

The "Rock Band" music list has more than 700 songs and is growing by the week, according to Drake.

Musicians and labels once leery of making songs available digitally for games are now embracing the opportunity.

"It's been quite a while since we really struggled to get bands into the game," Drake said. "We are submerged with offers and have a huge licensing team working around the clock; that list of songs keeps growing."

Games unveiled at E3 include an [Electronic Arts](#) "Brutal Legend" title, in which heavy metal rock band members wielding guitars and chords as weapons battle demons in a hellish landscape.

The game features the voices of actor Jack Black and rock legends such

as former Black Sabbath front man Ozzy Osbourne.

Microsoft, Konami, and Disney Interactive Studios are each showing off karaoke-themed videogames.

Disney's "Sing It: Pop Hits" features a virtual voice coach to teach players crooning techniques for sliding between musical keys, performing harmonies, and breathing properly.

Players can then compete head-to-head, singing along to hits while original music videos play in the background of a virtual stage where animated characters are performing.

Konami's latest "Karaoke Revolution" provides players with virtual worlds containing lavish stages on which they can sing any of hundreds of songs ranging from rock to country western tunes.

Sony has "SingStar" karaoke for its PlayStation 3 consoles, and Microsoft has made "Lips" for the US technology firm's Xbox 360 devices.

The music game genre has been evolving since "PaRappa The Rapper" launched for the original PlayStation in the mid-1990s, according to Michael Johnson, director of first-party games at Microsoft.

"The music genre has evolved rapidly and the 'Guitar Hero' franchise has sent it into the stratosphere," said Johnson, as he let E3 participants test "Lips."

"Music games let people who aren't hardcore gamers participate. People who would be intimidated by a controller can now sing. Who doesn't want to be a rock star?"

The "Guitar Hero" franchise has been a videogame superstar since the innovative title and its mock-guitar controllers were introduced in 2005.

Motion-sensing microphones let "Lips" players score extra points with dramatic performance gestures.

"Lips" incorporates music from top artists and, as with other videogame makers, is built to be expanded with songs bought as online downloads.

"The music industry is still figuring out exactly how to play in the gaming space," Johnson said. "They see a great revenue opportunity. If we make a great game and they can sell their music, that works."

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