

To See a World in a Grain of Memes

Review of Pippin Barr's "Epic Sax Game"

Internet memes: once, the inside jokes of online forums - now, low-brow cultural artifacts so mainstream that [politicians](#) and [airlines](#) use them. Enter Pippin Barr's "Epic Sax Game" - a game that follows the man in the [meme](#) from practice to memedom. What first seems to be a game with a referential gimmick delves into deep commentary on how to pursue artistic expression. Through open-ended game design, "Epic Sax Game" transcends the idea of "simplistic media" and highlights the conflict between self-expression and popularity.

Despite its straightforward design, "Epic Sax Game" is actually a mechanically challenging game. Like the "[Nintendo Hard](#)" games the retro graphics reference, the game's interface offers little hand-holding - a key press for each note which is unforgivingly matched against the original tune's timing. These realistic mechanics corresponds well with Epic Sax Guy's probable practice regime. The player struggles with the Guy as he improves, eventually forgoing the on-screen "sheet music" and playing from memory.

If the player goes through the level listings in the implied chronological order, we see the player gradually improve his technical skills, mastering the riff. However, at Eurovision, this accumulated technical mastery is rendered useless - more time is spent waiting than playing! The sax feels ancillary to the entire production; while the other band members constantly move around and dance, our character is expected to stand still until we're cued to play - a waste of intensively trained skills. The Youtube level thus becomes a relief - a chance for the player's real skill to be recognized. Unlike the few cameos in Eurovision, every 7 second chunk of that 10 hours is devoted to the player, giving our contributions the attention they deserved. The immediate fan feedback also gives us instant

gratification that our art is appreciated broadly.

However, if the player plays non-chronologically, a new narrative emerges. With the Youtube level no longer the game's climax, playing the same riff feels unsatisfying and boring. Although the video provides a constant spotlight, the irrelevant comments reveal that this attention is a false, fragile fame. The public may love us, but only for playing familiar things (like the [other memes](#) in the [related videos](#)), and certainly does not appreciate our work or creativity. We're so pigeonholed into this monotonous typecast that we soon rack up dislikes as soon as we start trying to play anything else.

Instead of focusing on Youtube fame, the non-chronological level ordering suggests a new success metric: improvisational creativity. Under this new framework, previously "difficult" game design elements now encourage creating our own music! The lack of sheet music frees the player of a set Rock-Band-esque script, while the Jam Session being scored on number of notes played enables the player to focus on making noise, not on the Epic Sax tune. Even the omnipresent bass beat and limited note set - a hold over from the demands of the Epic Sax tune we're trying to escape - serve to help us with our creativity, similar to how a pentatonic scale's limited range [encourages improvisation](#). From these elements, we are free to discover new harmonies and even play chords (impossible on a normal sax).

"Epic Sax Game" is more than just a meme joke; it actually presents the chief conflict of every artist. Either pursue fame at all costs by sticking to popular repetition, or search for your own form of performance within preset limitations. Whether it's [completing all 10 hours](#) of the Youtube level or improvising with impossible chords, "Epic Sax Game" succeeds by providing enough flexibility to satisfy any artistic vision.