

Welp boys and girls, here we are. In celebration of *Orange Lounge Radio*'s **8th** anniversary, I'm taking a look at the game that almost singlehandedly brought us together way back in 2002. But that's not where it begins. The story actually starts back in 1998, when
Dance Dance Revolution
first landed in arcades in Japan. If you're really ready for this one, hit the jump below to continue reading!

The earliest iteration of 1st MIX actually only had a scant handful of songs. Some of which crafted in-house by Konami by the likes of NAOKI, but also thanks to a partnership with record label TOSHIBA-EMI Japan the game also featured a handful of their CD series, *Dancemania.* The Dancemania albums featured nonstops of various licensed artists' songs, all back-to-back on one long track. Selections included such timeless favorites as Olivia Newton John's 'Have You Never Been Mellow' and KC and the Sunshine Band's 'That's The Way (I Like It)', in addition to artists from other countries, such as Smile.DK and what has to be the most popular license of all time, Butterfly.

There were a few upgrades to the original release, which added some new songs and the debut of the 'Internet Ranking' system. Where much like the other games in the BEMANI line at the time, featured several courses you could play and upon completion you were awarded with an Internet Ranking password. You would then take this password and input it to the website specific to each game, and you could see how you stacked up against the competition.

It wasn't until 1999 that DDR made its debut in US arcades. Unfortunately it featured only a dozen songs, so unless your arcade was willing to import one of the Japanese/Korean mixes,

you were pretty much stuck with those, at least until October of 2000, when DDR USA was released. It featured a few more songs, although it didn't retain any of the 1st MIX licenses.

Eventually Konami would go on to release many additional games in the series (*which I'll go more in-depth into below*
) but I wanted to highlight some of the more interesting entries:

- Dance Dance Revolution: Best of Cool Dancers - This was a specialized tournament edition of DDR. No mods, no difficulty select, and four of the hardest songs of the time: Let's Get Down (Single, Basic), Butterfly (Double, Trick/Another), Little Bitch (Single, Basic) and PARANOiA (Single, Trick/Another) The tournament was held around the time of 3rd Mix's debut.
- Dancing Stage: True Kiss Destination - Another one of the 'Single Aritst' games like the ones from beatmania week, this one featured songs by the group True Kiss Destination, in addition to a few of Konami's more popular original tracks.
- Dancing Stage: Dreams Come True - Similar in style to DS: TKD but much like the one that was done for beatmania, this version featured songs from the group Dreams Come True.

- Dancing Stage Featuring Disney's Rave - Perhaps the most popular DDR-related spinoff, this game featured in addition to some new exclusive licenses, there were some great eurobeat covers of popular Disney songs, as well as the only DDR appearance of the Eurobeat classic, Night of Fire (interestingly there was also an N64 version with a whole different set of Disney-related songs, like the one from the Enchanted Tiki Room, a personal favorite of mine!)

- OhaSta! Dance Dance Revolution - Featuring music from the Japanese children's program Oha Star!
- DDR SOLO - I can't say whether or not it 'sucks', as I've never actually played it. I *did* play on a SOLO machine, but it was converted into a MAX2. (
And if you're wondering about the origin of that infamous catch phrase, click
here
) The game usually is only one player, but you can apparently link multiple machines together. Also new to this version are UL and UR arrow panels, which makes the harder songs even more crazy with two additional directions!

- Dreamcast editions - Both 'DDR 2nd MIX' and "DDR Club Version' had exclusive versions made for the SEGA Dreamcast. What was nice about the DC versions of DDR, is the GDROMs were big enough to hold all the songs and didn't need the club version to be split into two volumes like the PSX versions did.

So now that I've spotlighted some of the more 'interesting' titles let me focus on the main series

a little bit more. The most interesting thing about 2nd MIX was a mode that as far as I know, hasn't been seen since! This was called 'Step Battle Mode' and it was pretty interesting. Look at this youtube to see what I mean:

Apparently in this mode, each player invents a set of steps on the fly and the other player has to dance to them, and whoever gets the highest score wins. Another more well-known mode appeared in Dancing Stage: Disney's RAVE, MAGIC DANCE!:

Each character in the lineup had their own specific attacks, like slowing down the arrows, speeding them up, activating hidden/sudden/shuffle or any number of other mods. Interestingly this mode would also resurface in a way in the first of the newer generation of DDRs, DDR SuperNOVA.

But I'm getting ahead of myself, so let's back up a bit. The first really big release was DDR 3rd MIX, which featured even more songs, and some all-new Dancemania licenses. One neat feature was the ability to revert the game to '2nd MIX mode' to play some of the songs only available in that mix. Another great addition to 3rd MIX was 'link data'. The machine featured slots that supported both the PSX memory card, and I do believe it also supported the little-seen Pocketstation.

This slot was used for transferring various types of data, such as high scores, edits you've made utilizing the home version of the games, or unique to 3rd mix, something called 'Paint Data' where you could actually edit your own arrow designs and use them in-game!

One interesting side note, 3rd MIX was the only version to have both a 'Korean' version (actually there were two!) featuring some exclusive K-Pop tracks like Ba Kkwo and Beautiful 21c, and an Asian version as well. Both 3rd and 4th MIX had a minor upgrade released for them called the 'PLUS' upgrade, which added even more extra songs to both games.(And if

memory serves, 4th MIX PLUS did revive most if not all of the Korean exclusive songs!)

After that came 5th MIX, which introduced another neat innovation, Long Version songs! These songs took up two song slots, so if your machine was set to three songs per credit, you could do one long version song and one regular-length song. Also great about this mix, was it was actually the first game in the series to be in 60FPS instead of just 30, so the animation was *muc h*
smoother. You wouldn't think it'd make that big a difference since it was just scrolling arrows, but trust me, it's almost like night and day!

DDRMAX came next, and amazingly, didn't feature almost any repeats from the previous arcade games in the series! And on top of that, the 'foot' rankings that players had become accustomed to (songs were originally rated from 1-9 feet, 9's being 'Catastrophic' or 'cata' for short.) in favor of a 'Groove Radar' which displayed certain attributes of a given song, like how many UD/LR jumps it had, or how 'chaotic' a songs arrows were. As for in-game one new innovation was the 'freeze' arrow, where you actually had to hold your foot down for the duration of the note, or you'll get an N.G. and won't get as high of a score.

This was also the mix that introduced the 'Extra Stage' and "One More Extra Stage', where if you AA your last song on Heavy difficulty, you'd get to play the Extra Stage, in this one it was 'MAX300' a blazingly fast track that intimidates all but the most hardcore players. AA *that* and you get access to Candy, but watch out! one non-combo step in the Extra Stage, and its game over!

DDRMAX2 was next, and this had to be the one I have the fondest memories of, at least in the arcade. Konami fixed alot of the problems like reviving the foot rankings (for those that couldn't make heads or tails of the 'Groove Radar') as well as reviving some old favorites via new special 'From Nonstop Megamix' remixes, all with only one difficulty, the all-new 'ONI' difficulty. (or 'Challenge' here in the US)

Perhaps the most controversial feature in MAX2 was its unlock system. Every time you play a song, you get X amount of pionts depending on how well you did. If memory serves its like 3 for a 'AAA' (all perfect steps) 'AA's are two, and everything else is like 1 point. and after a certain number of points, a new something would be unlocked. MAX2 had some pretty sweet unlocks, like one of my favorite songs ever, Burning Heat! by Motoaki F

But the unlock system was a double-edged sword. You see, Konami also released codes online for the operators that wanted to 'speed-unlock' the game without having to wait for the other players to have to do the work themselves. Unfortunately we (the regulars that would later go on to form OLR) would've liked to be able to unlock the game ourselves, but the management wouldn't have it. The downside to these unlock codes is if you've unlocked an item that's outside the range of each code (1-5, 1-10, 1-15, 1-20, 1-25, and the full unlock, 1-30) it relocks anything outside of that that you have unlocked previously. So it *really* sucked for us to lose all that hard work!

Luckily, in Extreme I do believe it was all operator-based unlocks, which was definetly bad for those arcades that were the exact opposite, and couldn't be bothered to play with the inner workings of the settings messing with codes and whatnot. But even without the special unlocks in Extreme, there were still a whole bunch of new songs and old favorites to play, like several songs from across other BEMANI (V and Frozen Ray from IIDX, Jet World from GF/dm, and even 'Hold on Me' from ParaParaParadise!)

Ironic that EXTREME's tagline on the machine was 'We're Starting Over!' because after that, there was literally *NOTHING* released in arcades for almost four years, up until .2006 (*Luckily the same couldn't be said for the home front, where Extreme 2 on PS2 and three Ultramix games were released on the original XBOX, and Mario MIX was the lone GameCube release.*)

January 12th, 2006. We'd *just* given up the ghost on the whole 'BEMANI' thing in favor of traditional gaming news podcasting. I was eagerly anticipating birthday-related shenanigans when I was making the rounds on both the gaming blogs and bemani news sites (because what can I say, I guess I'm not nearly as 'done' with the series as the others were...) And that's when I saw it. Konami had surprised gamers wanting more DDR with the first all-new game in almost four years, DDR SuperNOVA! While all of your favorite KOs returned, most all of the Dancemania licenses had to be cut, although they did include a few all new ones, including one by Dancemania mainstay Captain Jack (NEVAR FORGET) who had recently passed away prior to SuperNOVA's release due to a heart attack.

The interesting thing about SN1 was that the traditional background videos from MAX-onward were replaced by a polygonal stage and the dancing characters (who I just realized I just don't think I have room to name them all, especially the PC-exclusive ones) Unfortunately several issues plagued this release, like timing issues and the fact that the boss songs were never

unlocked for regular play, at least in America.

Sometime in 2008, Konami released another new update, DDR SuperNOVA 2. Most of the same things from the original were back, although there were a whole bunch of new songs and crossovers (The biggest surprise for me was the *Guitar Freaks* classic, FIRE actually appeared as an unlock.) One of the best parts of SN2 were that the unlock codes were back, *and* were easily entered by the player: just put in your credit, and enter the code at the 'press start' screen! And once they're entered, the songs stay unlocked permanently!

2009 saw the release of Dance Dance Revolution X, which saw quite a few changes. Aside from the all-new machine itself, some of the other changes were the all-new announcer (Which I gotta say I'm not feeling it as much as either the 3rd MIX-era one (*who is NOT Thomas Howard, I don't know how that rumor got started*) or the MAXtreme-era one.) As far as other changes, at some point between the release of the JP version and the US one, the rights to the lyrics for the 3rd MIX mainstay Dynamite Rave had expired, so Konami had to rewrite history and come up with all-new lyrics. Also new in this game were 'Shock Arrows' which were like mines, but they spanned all four arrow columns.

About the only good thing that came of DDR X were the 'X-Edits', Dancemania revivals from the olden days of DDR, songs like 'Butterfly', 'HERO' and 'Boys' were all revived -- and re-cut from different sections of each song.

Currently location testing in Japan, is DDR X2. Which is entirely different from the 'DDR X2' that came out in the US on PS2. But it doesn't appear like there will ever be a 'proper' home version of DDR X2. And as far as next-gen versions of DDR is concerned, there have only been a handful of Wii and XBOX 360 versions released so far, no sign of the updated new DDR for PS3/360 that was shown at e3 last year.

But what *was* shown at this year's E3, was Dance Masters on the XBOX 360's new motion control system, Kinect. If I may let you in on a little secret, My original plans were to do an entire 'Retro Rearview' article on the motion controlled games (ParaParaParadise, DancemaniaX, Martial Beat) that Konami had released after this week's on DDR, and this was all prior to the unveiling of Dance Masters at this year's E3!

So if you're curious as to why some of us are having a huge fangasm over one lousy song on Dance Masters' songlist, tune in next week and I'll explain why the fuck it's such a big deal.. :P