

# Night Parade of 100 Demons

Adapting Japanese folklore to game musicking research

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## ABSTRACT

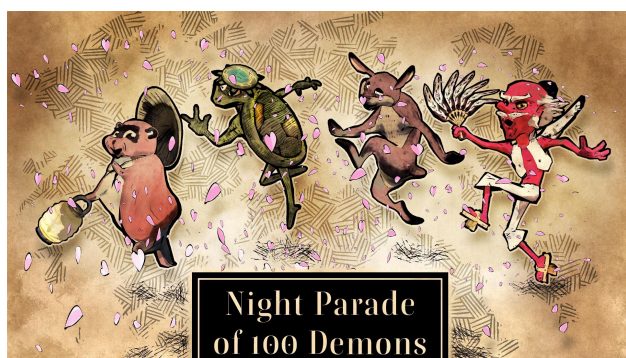


Figure 1: *Night Parade of 100 Demons* splash page

This paper presents *Night Parade of 100 Demons* (Oliva, 2024), a research-oriented mobile game designed to foster musical improvisation, here identified as an under practiced form of game musicking (Oliva, 2019, 2023). It consists of four minigames each starring a different yōkai, mischievous creatures of Japanese folklore. Each yōkai is the protagonist of a musical, playful vignette, inspired by popular yokai legends<sup>1</sup>.

*Night Parade of 100 Demons* is situated within ludomusicological research focused on musicking with digital games, aiming to expand on this topic by applying a Research through Design (RtD) methodology, starting with “open-ended research aims” (Colton & Hook, 2017) to “materialize the design questions or aesthetic issues that are being addressed” (Khaled, Lessard, & Barr, 2018). Applied game design efforts, of which RtD can be

considered as a subset, are beneficial for their ability to generate discussion: “the public can download and play [RtD] games to form and reflect on their opinions [...]. Knowledge simultaneously exists in the thing and in the articulation of the thing” (Khaled, Lessard, & Barr, 2018). To achieve this objective, the game adopts a Japanese scenario, using four popular yōkai, an umbrella term for Japanese spirits, monsters and supernatural entities. As noted by Hutchinson, “the Japanese game industry has long leveraged monsters (yōkai) to promote the sales of digital games and media-mix merchandising” (Hutchinson, 2025); also, the transmedia expansion of yōkai is considered as “an outcome of transmedia adaptation practices (known as ‘media mix’ in Japan) in the modern period by creators, media companies, and other social agents” (Suzuki, 2019). *Night Parade of 100 Demons* contains identifiable elements of Japanese folklore, and it can therefore be inserted within the ongoing debate about the shifting nature and value of Japaneseness within digital games. As noted by Consalvo, “game developers and publishers speculate on whether a Japanese game’s Japaneseness should be downplayed or erased completely to avoid unpleasant cultural “odors”, [while] others wonder if Japaneseness in a game (such as in *Okami* or *Tokyo Jungle*) should be highlighted, enhanced, and made a selling point. Critics try to determine the elements within a game that actually express Japaneseness (Consalvo, 2016, p. 4)”.

<sup>1</sup> One of the main sources of inspiration was the *Konjaku Hyakki Shū* (今昔百鬼拾遺 – More of the Demon Horde from Past and Present), a compendium of yōkai, demons and ghosts compiled by Toriyama Sekien, published in 1780/81.



Figure 2: Tanuki minigame

The reference to *yōkai* leveraged by *Night Parade of 100 Demons* is however directly connected with the design objectives of the game, which, as mentioned, intends to invite players to musical improvisation. In fact, the recurring motif of the “*hyakkiyago*” (alternatively pronounced *hyakkiyako*), which can be translated as “night procession of one hundred oni” [is] a carnivalesque topsy-turvy parade in which all manner of creatures and objects danced riotously, musically, through the streets” (Foster, 2015). The connection between *yōkai* and playful musicality is therefore deeply rooted: Foster crucially adds that *yōkai* “are not always scary: they are also about play, or the “*ludic mode*.” In fact, *yōkai* are often produced through playfulness (...). For all the spookiness they may educe, *yōkai* are also fun. And this levity is one key to their longevity and versatility: if the zone of uncertainty allows limitless possibilities and unbridled imagination, then it is a space of experimentation and play and ultimately of creation” (Foster, 2015).

The playful, creative musical experimentation evoked by the *hyakkiyago* is a rare, precious match with the aesthetic issues tackled by *Night Parade of 100 Demons*: creating an environment where freeform musical improvisation can be practiced. Game design research and game studies alike have in fact clarified how the representational element of digital games is instrumental in shaping player experience. Borrowing terminology from semiotics, Aarseth and Calleja refer to “the concept of sign [as] the interpretable, ‘surface’ representational elements that players read/observe in order to be able to use/play the game” (2015). Similarly, game designer Steve Swink clarifies that “the game’s representation and treatment change player expectations about the behavior, movement and interactions of game objects” (2008, p. 100)

In that regard, *Night Parade of 100 Demons* practically and ideally enacts an unruly parade of *yōkai*, aiming to change players’ expectations about what is appropriate musically wise within the context of digital games. *Yōkai* act as powerful representational elements, and intend to signify a

liberated, informal, chaotic approach to musical improvisation. In line with the objective of RtD methodology, the game has been presented in a diverse range of settings and events, being also selected to participate in BitSummit 2025, the largest indie game festival in Japan, which this year will revolve around the theme of “*Summer of Yōkai*”.

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