

Video Game Review: ‘Guitar Hero 5’ Places Emphasis on Quantity Over Quality

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 15, 2009 - 4:51pm

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CHICAGO – Perhaps you’ve seen the clever commercials for “Guitar Hero 5,” in which a dozen or so hot women dance around with plastic guitars and Hugh Hefner extols the virtues of “variety”? There has arguably never been more truth in advertising. Like a roomful of Playboy Playmates, “Guitar Hero 5” gives fans all the variety they could ask for, but truly falling in love with any individual part of the title is a little more difficult.



Maybe it's simply a byproduct of the international love affair with music games sort of fizzling out, but my response to “Guitar Hero 5” is that the title is exactly what I expected it to be - no more and no less. The bang-for-your-buck approach to the game is unassailable as the experience is simply enormous with dozens of songs, challenges, and multi-player possibilities, but is more always better?



Guitar Hero 5
Photo credit: Activision/Neversoft

In concept and execution, “Guitar Hero 5” feels like a slight upgrade from “World Tour,” but it still feels like a franchise designed around the “if it ain’t broke don’t fix it” mantra of consumerism. That’s both understandable and unfortunate, since I really think it’s time that “Guitar Hero” takes a radical step forward and try and provide something new instead of just something more. Granted, I enjoyed most of my time with “Guitar Hero 5” and that’s ultimately what matters most when you’re considering a game purchase, but it feels like a band I like releasing an album that sounds a lot like what they’ve released before, when I really wish they’d stretch their wings a bit and give me something truly surprising.



Guitar Hero 5

Photo credit: Activision/Neversoft

For most people who play “Guitar Hero 5,” the key make-or-break element is going to be song selection and it’s a pretty clever mix of the expected and some undeniable surprises. One of my favorite elements of “Guitar Hero 5” is the breadth of the song choices. Going from “Ring of Fire” by Johnny Cash to “Du Hast” by Rammstein undeniably made me smile. Even if there are some odd and arguably unenjoyable song choices, there are so many of them that it seems like nit-picking to say, for example, that they could have picked a better Beck song than “Gamma Ray,” that Zakk Wylde should be prosecuted for his awful version of “Bring the Noise,” or that some of these titles (“Feel Good, Inc.,” “Ex-Girlfriend”) have already been done better as “Rock Band” DLC.

Yet some of the songs are absolute blasts in choice and design. “Under Pressure,” “Make It Wit Chu,” “Nearly Lost You,” “You Give Love a Bad Name,” “Song 2,” “Only Happy When it Rains” - all are fun enough to play multiple times and they’re not alone. And it’s cool to see predictable band choices like Weezer, Muse, and Beastie Boys (“GH” regulars) alongside new inductees into the catalog like Vampire Weekend, TV on the Radio, and Sunny Day Real Estate.

There are also subtle but crucial tweaks to the organizational structure of the game that work, but mostly in the sense that they should have been fixed years ago. Let’s face it, the “Guitar Hero” franchise had some ridiculous flaws until now that have finally been corrected, including being able to sort tracks, play all available tracks via Quickplay from day one, and, FINALLY, being able to play previously downloaded content in this new title, even being able to import some tracks from “World Tour” and “Smash Hits”. It’s about time.



Guitar Hero 5

Photo credit: Activision/Neversoft

The unexpected alterations to the “GH” structure are mostly pleasant and all seem designed around accessibility of play. The game has clearly been built to try and bring the party element of the music game genre back to popularity. Not only are all tracks playable from day one but the user interface allows players to sign in and out much more easily, change difficulty on the fly, and even jump into a song right from the title screen.

As for the new multiplayer modes, they’re a mixed bag for me. There are interesting new variations, but it seems like overkill when they’re all

basically built around hitting the most notes at the right time. Far more interesting are the challenges, in-song bonus challenges like maintaining song power for a certain amount of time or whammy-ing the sustains that will earn you unlockable outfits and trophies.

On a visual and sound level, not much has changed. The audio tracks sound better mixed than “World Tour,” which is a definite upgrade, but they’ve sounded better during “Metallica” and “Smash Hits” as well, so that’s not really surprising.



Guitar Hero 5

Photo credit: Activision/Neversoft

My biggest problem with “Guitar Hero 5” is probably visual. It was a good idea to jettison the career mode cut-scenes and forced story but what they’ve been replaced with is a series of interchangeable locations that just feel silly and arbitrary. Finishing a set of songs in a goofy-looking location like “Guitarhenge” unlocks another set of songs in a goofy-looking location like “Angel’s Crypt”. None of the locations have any meaning or real personality. I know that “GH” has always been the more cartoon-ish franchise but it feels pushed to the limit in “GH5”, especially when cartoon versions of icons like Johnny Cash and Kurt Cobain have been inserted into the stylized world. And the uninspiring locations add to the feeling that career mode is nothing more than a “Play All on Quickplay” option.

Ultimately, you can’t fault Neversoft for giving fans more, More, MORE. With a new “Guitar Hero” release every quarter - “Guitar Hero: Van Halen” will be out by the end of the year - the franchise may suffer a bit from overexposure but, for some fans, these titles and the songs they hold are like Playboy Playmates - you can’t have too many.

‘Guitar Hero 5’ was released by Activision and developed by Neversoft. It is rated T (Teen). The version reviewed was for the PS3, but the title is also available for the XBox 360 and Wii. It was released on September 1st, 2009.



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