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SECTIONS

search ign

Artists List  
Albums List  
Reviews  
Reader Reviews  
Features  
Game Music  
Film Music  
News  
Editors' Choice  
Release Dates  
Audio Gear  
Music Labels  
Mailbag  
Boards  
Compare Prices

CHANNELS

Insider Members

- Insider Channel
- Video Reviews
- Strategy Guides
- Join Insider
- Join Founders

Games

- PlayStation 2
- Xbox
- GameCube
- PC Games
- Game Boy
- Nintendo DS
- Sony PSP
- Wireless
- N-Gage
- PlayStation
- N64
- Dreamcast
- Mac
- PC Downloads
- Top Games

Cheats & Codes

- PS2 Cheats
- Xbox Cheats
- Cube Cheats
- PC Cheats
- GBA Cheats
- Top Cheats
- FAQs
- Game Guides

Entertainment

- Movies
- DVD
- Music
- Gear
- Sports
- Cars
- Babes

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- Reviews
- Previews
- News
- Game Help

IGN Services

- Message Boards
- User Pages
- My Collection
- My Wishlist
- Newswire
- Free Email
- Newsletter
- Chat
- My Account

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- GameStats
- GameSpy
- Planet Sites
- Vault Sites
- TeamXbox
- VE3D
- RT Movies
- StarPulse

GAMESTORE

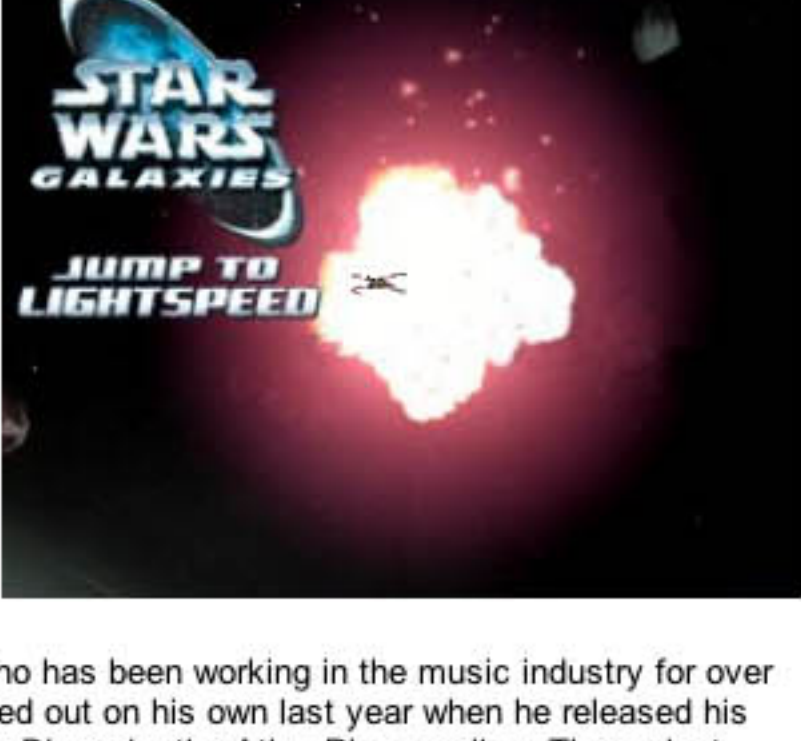
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- PS2 Games
- Xbox Games
- Cube Games
- PC Games
- GBA Games

## Tom Salta Interview

The composer discusses how he came to score *Need For Speed Underground 2*.

November 24, 2004 - Composer **Tom Salta** has made a name for himself over the past few years thanks to his aggressive electronic compositions which he has either licensed to or composed for such video games as *Rallisport Challenge 2*, *Street Racing Syndicate*, and *Need For Speed Underground 2*, as well as also having his work appear on such television programs as *Third Watch*, *Punk'd*, and others.

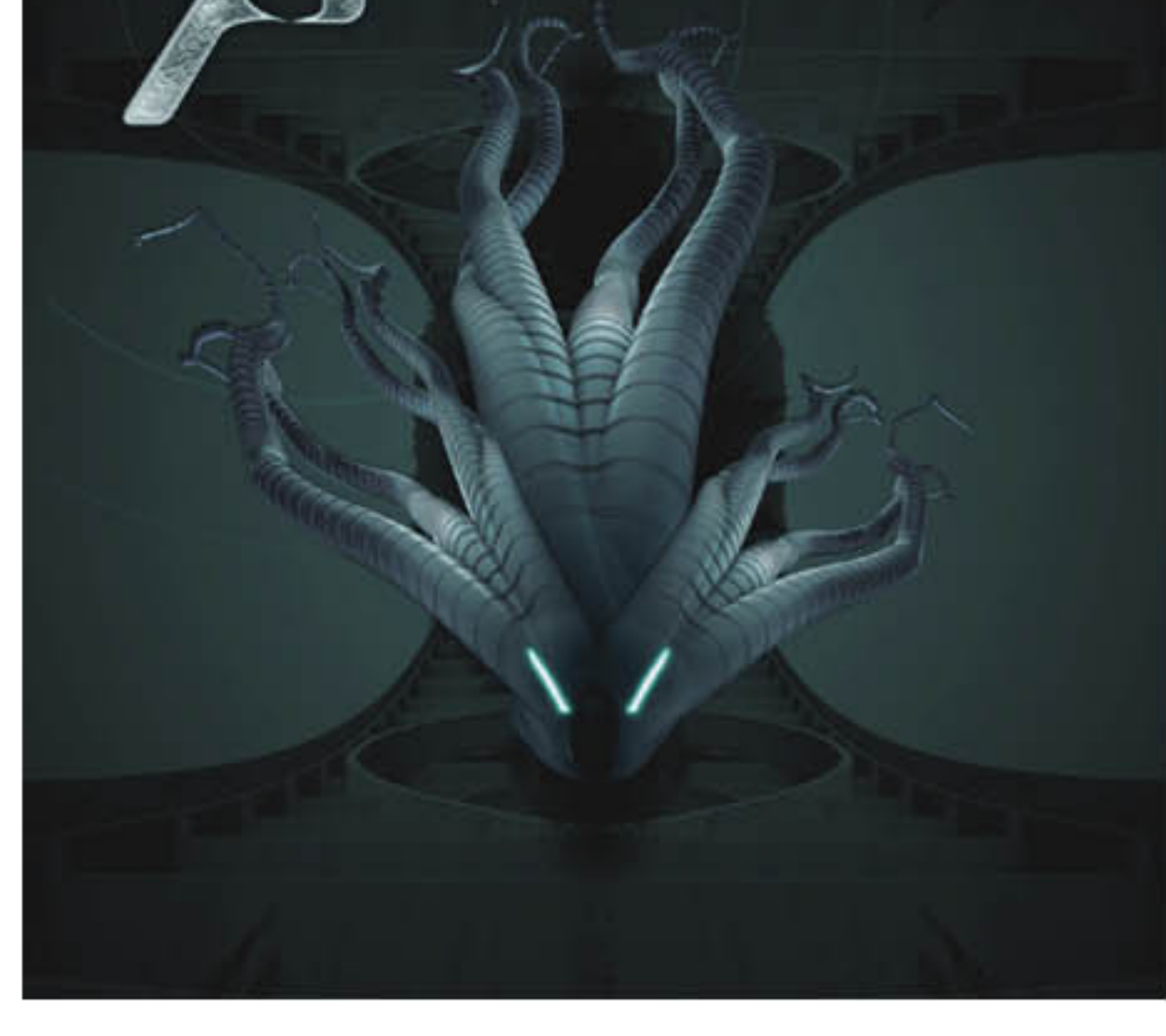


A musician and producer who has been working in the music industry for over 15 years now, Salta branched out on his own last year when he released his debut solo album *2 Days Or Die* under the Atlas Plug moniker. The project really began to take flight once various songs from the album were licensed for such high profile projects as *Rallisport Challenge 2* and a major Volvo television spot. The resulting exposure has helped Salta score additional scoring work, his most recent being the theme music and in-game music for *Need For Speed Underground 2*, as well as co-writing the theme for *Ghost Recon 2* along with fellow composer Bill Brown.

We caught up with Salta during some rare down time between gigs and he graciously discussed all aspects of his career, including his Atlas Plug material and his most recent full-scale project, crafting the music for *Need For Speed Underground 2*.

**Spence D., Editor-In-Chief, IGN Music: Looking at your list of scoring credits, while driving games aren't the only projects you've worked on, you have scored a rather large chunk of this particular genre of video game...**

**Tom Salta:** That's true and that's probably mostly because the first batch were license music and the music that they licensed off of my album was perfect for that kind of stuff. Like in *Rallisport Challenge 2* they licensed the title track off of my Atlas Plug CD, *2 Days Or Die*. And ironically Volvo licensed the same song for their S40 commercial, which featured footage from *Rallisport*.



**IGN Music: Nice. So what do you think it is about your music that makes it such a perfect fit for driving games?**

**Tom Salta:** I think, in particular, a lot of the Atlas Plug songs are perfect for driving games just because of the sheer energy that they have, the driving nature that they have. They're very aggressive, so it fits the mood of that kind of stuff. People have come up to me and just said 'That is the best record to drive to.' I think it's just the energy. I think it pumps you up.

**IGN Music: So, do you drive around in your car late at night, perhaps keeping you pedal to the metal in an attempt to capture that rush and get ideas for your music? And, conversely, have you ever taken your Atlas Plug CD out for a spin in your car, you know to test the "drivability" of your music?**

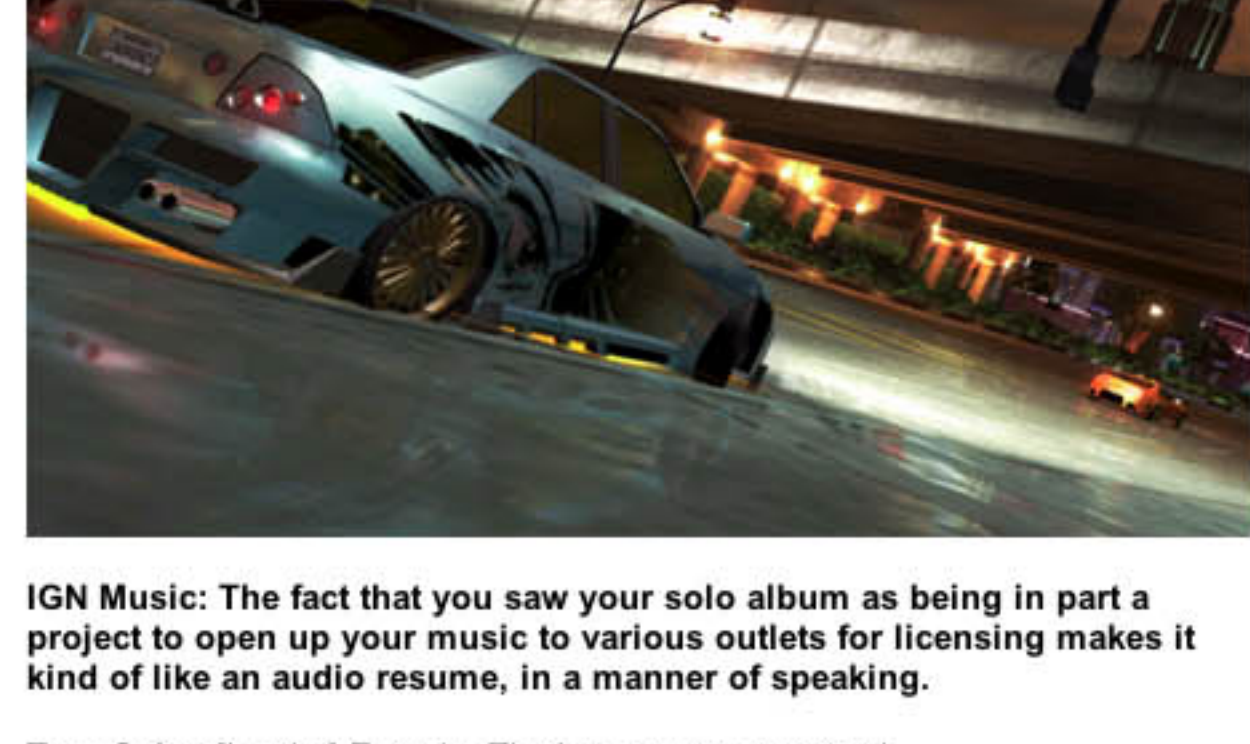
**Tom Salta:** The first question, the answer is "No." I don't really think about the music that I do before I do it, especially when it comes to something that's very personal to me like a solo album. But yes, I have taken it out driving and it's cool [laughs].

**IGN Music: Then you can back up what fans have said in terms of it really being good music to drive to, right?**

**Tom Salta:** Oh absolutely.

**IGN Music: Since you have released a solo album, the Atlas Plug project, which do you prefer more, working on your own, personal music or being commissioned to compose for films, television, and video games?**

**Tom Salta:** It's funny. Both of those things are *exactly* what I want to be doing. I said two years ago when I came up with the idea for the Atlas Plug record and before I really got into the games industry that "Two years from now my dream would be to be just recording my solo records and scoring video games all the time." And that's exactly what I'm doing. I don't have a preference. They're both great because one allows me to do every style of music under the sun—everything from horror music to pop music to military music and even orchestral scores. And then my solo record just allows me to be me and not have to worry about certain criteria, you know it allows me to just be an artist and do what I love to do while coming up with a unique identity. That was the whole concept behind it. The thing with my record is that it's very visual. I mean the whole concept was to come up with a unique identity and a whole record that would be perfect for licensing in video games, TV, film, etc. and that's exactly what happened. It started with video games, it started by getting licensed in *Rallisport Challenge 2*, *Street Racing Syndicate*, then the TV thing kicked in with Volvo, and then a lot of television shows have licensed it like *Third Watch*, *Joan of Arcadia*, *Top Model*, and even some movie projects like *The Making of Spider-Man 2*, *The Making of Anacondas: Search For The Blood Orchid*, and stuff like that. It's great. It's a very visual record and I think that's why the video game industry has embraced it so much. It works perfectly and it's kind of a perfect fit with what I do.



**IGN Music: The fact that you saw your solo album as being in part a project to open up your music to various outlets for licensing makes it kind of like an audio resume, in a manner of speaking.**

**Tom Salta:** [laughs] Exactly. That's a great way to put it.

**IGN Music: Now I mean the fact that it's your music that you've created makes it art, but then the fact that you created it with the express intent of selling it makes it a commercial product, as well. How do you tread the lines between art and exploiting it for your own commercial gain?**

**Tom Salta:** I think that comes from my experience. I've been in the music business for 15 years and I've produced and written on lots and lots of things for artists like Whitney Houston and Peter Gabriel, and others. And I've learned something very important along the way: you can do music for enjoyment and that's great, but this is the music business. The key is to find that magic combination of what you enjoy doing artistically—especially if you're going to be an artist—and something that will appeal to other people who would actually like to buy it. And I thought about it a lot. I thought about "What kind of music can I do that's unique?"—I think it's really important that an artist has a sound that's immediately identifiable. I was so used to producing other people's music for so many years that quite frankly I didn't know what my identity was going to be before I started this record. So it was an exploration of my creative ideas for me. Fortunately I think I just found that niche, that creative combination that I love to do that shows off a lot of my inspirations, my identity, my ideas, and it's something that's fun to listen to. That's really the best way I can put it.

**IGN Music: Really the only other artist I can think of right off the bat who made an album and upon completion immediately licensed every song on it to various companies for use in advertising was Moby with his album *Play*.**

**Tom Salta:** You're exactly right about that. Moby was one of the two main artists I had in mind for the whole concept of how it would work business wise. Crystal Method was another one. Bands like Crystal Method and artists like Moby are licensed goldmines, they're always used in everything. I knew that forming my own record label and putting out my own record as a solo artist with no major marketing campaign or millions of dollars of promotion to pay off radio stations, I knew that I wasn't going to start selling all of these records right away. So I decided to really utilize the built-in marketing of other companies to advertise my music and the best way to do that is to license your music. So why not let Microsoft or Volvo pay for all the commercials, ads, and distribution for people to hear my music. I knew it would be a slow build, but to this day I'm selling records right off my **Atlas Plug website** all around the world. I've gotten sales from New Zealand, Switzerland, Alaska, just these obscure places. It's amazing to see how your music can get around. Of course I made sure that it was on iTunes and CDBaby. I felt that it was really important to have it available for those who just sort of stumble upon it. Ironically enough, if I had just wanted to make an artistic record that I wasn't going to advertise, we wouldn't be talking on the phone right now.

**IGN Music: You're probably right! So, how did you get involved with *Need For Speed Underground 2*?**

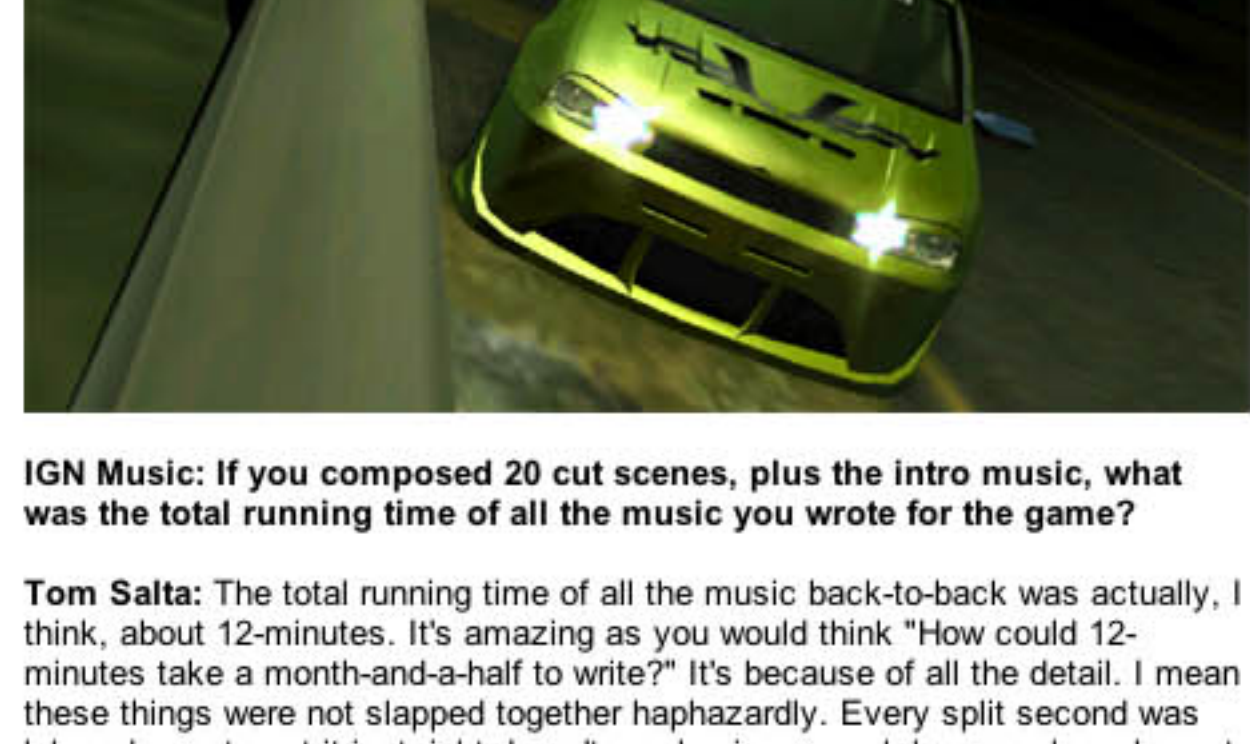
**Tom Salta:** Well that was a great example of what Atlas Plug has done. Charles Deenan, who is the music director for EA Canada, heard about Atlas Plug in *Rallisport Challenge 2* and he thought the sound would be great for *Need For Speed Underground 2*. He contacted my manager Bob Rice and next thing you know I got a phone call asking me to score all the cinematics in the game. So it was a direct result of Atlas Plug actually.

**IGN Music: What did scoring the cinematics entail?**

**Tom Salta:** They would send me each cinematic as it was completed and give me a document that spotted the scene, which means they described what they envisioned the music doing as the scene progressed. We started like that and then I'd come up with things, FTP them back to them, they'd listen, they'd make notes, I'd read the notes, and do the revisions. That's how the whole thing came about.

**IGN Music: What was the time frame on this? Did it take you a couple of weeks, a couple of months?**

**Tom Salta:** It was over a couple of months actually. There were a lot of cut scenes—I think there were about 20. Then after the whole project was done they asked me to do the music for the intro on the game, which I was very excited about since that's what most people are going to see and hear, especially if they don't finish the game. Once again, they wanted me to do something very much in the style of Atlas Plug, which definitely has a unique sound to it. So that's how it worked. And it was really great working with Charles Deenan because he's a great collaborator and he knows his stuff.



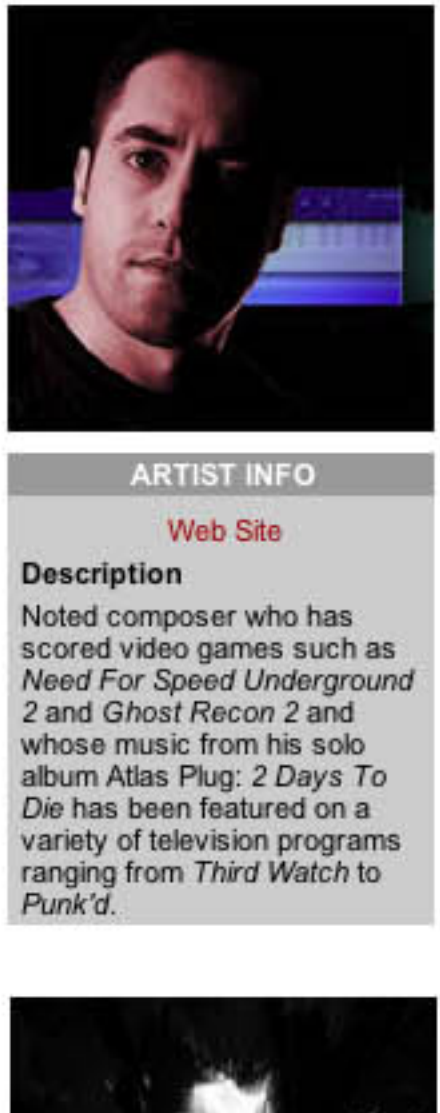
**IGN Music: If you composed 20 cut scenes, plus the intro music, what was the total running time of all the music you wrote for the game?**

**Tom Salta:** The total running time of all the music back-to-back was actually, I think, about 12-minutes. It's amazing as you would think "How could 12-minutes take a month-and-a-half to write?" It's because of all the detail. I mean these things were not slapped together haphazardly. Every split second was labored over to get it just right. I can't emphasize enough how much work went into this and how much credit I give to Charles Deenan. He really has a great sense of putting top quality production values to games, so he was really a great collaborator on this.

**IGN Music: I can only imagine that the music you turned in was much longer and then you both went through a rigorous editing and condensing process.**

**Tom Salta:** There was definitely a lot of revisions going in there and there's a lot of detail. So when you watch it you're like "Wow! That was just 20-seconds long?!" I mean some of these 20-second cut scenes took me longer to write than some of the stuff on my record, if you can believe that.

-- Spence D.



**ARTIST INFO**

[Web Site](#)

**Description**

Noted composer who has scored video games such as *Need For Speed Underground 2* and *Ghost Recon 2* and whose music from his solo album Atlas Plug: *2 Days To Die* has been featured on a variety of television programs ranging from *Third Watch* to *Punk'd*.

