

Oh, Maria, Maria

Yes, my name might be popular, but please, stop singing it to me



MARIA
KOTOVYCH

If anyone out there wants to write a musical, or any song for that matter, make sure that you include a character named Maria. Even better, make sure to name a song after her, and make sure the name Maria is included in a prominent line, like the refrain. But only do this if you really want to annoy everyone you know named Maria.

Some names just happen to show up in a lot of movies and songs. I happen to have one of those names. *The Sound of Music*. *West Side Story*. Latin music. And as much as I'd like to say this list is exhaustive, I regret that I can't.

Let's think about *The Sound of Music*. I love that movie. I really do. And I'm sure at one time I liked that song called "Maria." Now, not so much. You see, there is one line from that song that everyone always takes the liberty to sing to me: "How do you solve a problem like Maria?" I'm wincing in agony and gritting my teeth even as I type that.

Imagine being able to hear only one line from a song, but none of the other lines. And now imagine people singing that one line to you again and again, broken record-style. And then imagine watching these same people acting like they are the first ones who ever noticed that the person they are singing to shares a name with the person in that song. Welcome to the problem facing Maria.

There are other interesting lyrics in that song for those who desperately want to serenade me, nun-style, call me a pain in the ass, or simply grate on my nerves. I'm sure those Mother Superior wanna-bes can delve into that song and find some new lyrics to sing. Please, *anything* but that refrain, (which I absolutely refuse to re-write, by the way).

Now, thanks to all the closet Broadway stars out there, I can probably sing parts of "Maria" from *West Side Story*, even though I have never heard an actual recording of the song, nor have I ever seen the movie. However, being serenaded from this musical is a bit better because there isn't one, but two prominent lines from this song. One is "Maria, Maria!" and the other one is "I've just met a girl named Maria!"

But one night last year, I wished that the

characters from *West Side Story* had just stuck to their inter-group rivalry and kept their mouths shut. I was at a formal dinner-and-dance event put on by my ballroom dance club. I was all decked out, the lights were dim, and I was floating away to a nice, slow, lyrical waltz. Suddenly, my dancing partner decided that this would be a good time to blare "MARIA, MARIA!" right into my ear!

It seemed to me that a lot of the songs we danced to had a "Maria" in them. I don't speak or understand Spanish, but I could certainly understand when a backup vocalist would call: "Hey, Maria, Maria!" in the middle of a song. The distraction totally threw me off my groove.

And speaking of dancing, a few years ago, I was really into Latin dancing (salsa, meringue), and my friends and I used to hit a Latin club at least once a week. It seemed to me that a lot of the songs we danced to had a "Maria" in them. I don't speak or understand Spanish, but I could certainly understand when a backup vocalist would call: "Hey, Maria, Maria!" in the middle of a song. The distraction totally threw me off my groove. So there I was on the dance floor, mid-meringue with my partner, and I was looking around like: "What? huh? Did someone call me?"

That dance must have looked sexy. Very, very sexy.

But the strangest comment about my name that I've ever received was when someone asked me if I'm Jesus' mother. My friend was visiting his parents, and I when I phoned him, his father said that he wasn't home. So I said, "Can you please have him call Maria?" And what did his father say? "Maria? Oh, are you the mother of God?"

Thinking he was so clever, he laughed hysterically. But overcome with despair and rage, I ripped the phone out of the wall, Hulk-style, fell to my knees, and wailed "What have I done to deserve this, God? Why me? Why?"

So please be kind to your friendly neighbourhood Maria, because if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem.

Downhill Jam takes an unfortunate spill

Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam

Nintendo DS
Vicarious Visions
Activision
E for Everyone

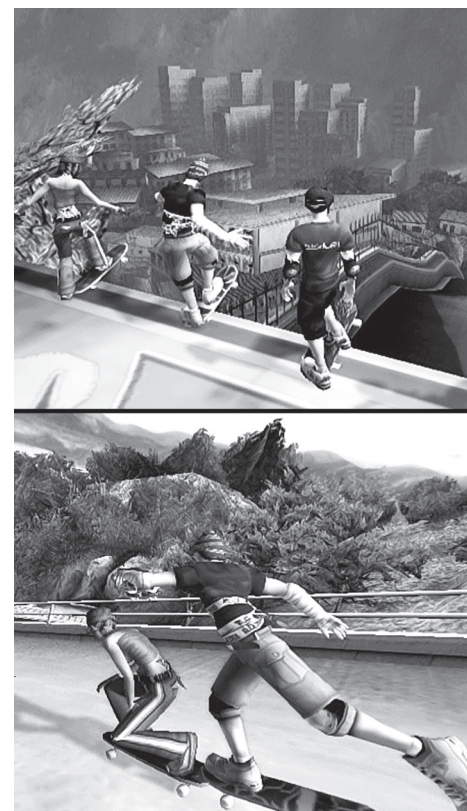
REID BUCKMASTER
Arts & Entertainment Writer

Fool me once, shame on me. Fool me three or more times and I must be a fucking idiot. Vicarious Visions: stop ruining the games I love. From back in the day when you wrecked my Spider-Man games on the Nintendo 64, to last week when you violated Tony Hawk on the DS—again—you have been pretty consistent at ruining other developers' good work.

To explain this, Neversoft, the developers that make the *Tony Hawk* skateboarding games we've come to know and love, aren't actually in charge of every *Tony Hawk* game out there. There's another lesser developer by the name of Vicarious Visions that takes care of a lot of successful games' follow-ups and spin-offs, games like *Tony Hawk* series, and they never quite manage to get them right. In this case, VV has been at the helm of the latest handheld iterations of the recent *Tony Hawk* games and been doing a pretty good job of taking a franchise that's easy to love and turning it into a chore to play.

Downhill Jam is a perfect example of this because, simply, *Tony Hawk* was never meant to be a racing game. For all you *Tony Hawk* veterans out there that remember the first game, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, do you remember the sub-par level that was actually called "Downhill Jam?" The dam level? In Phoenix? Yeah, that's what this whole game is. It's not the golden formula of open-world skateboarding with side goals thrown in—no, no. It's pretty much the SSX snowboarding games but on a skateboard, and it really doesn't transfer over well.

For one, the trick system just isn't conducive to the whole racing bit. It actually slows you down, and you have to do it because it's the only way to fill up the boost meter—a meter that basically does just that, allows you to boost to catch up after tricking. There are also problems with the way combos work out—well, namely, they don't. The DS D-Pad just doesn't seem to be able to handle the quick input necessary to come out of your 360 airwalk and into your nose manual. It's really the manuals that are the issue because you need them to link



your combos together, and the DS only registers the input for them maybe every second attempt, so racking up big points is way tougher than it should be.

The whole thing is packaged pretty oddly, too. The cut-scenes and all the in-game art have this weird, kiddy, Fisher Price look to them that really kills the long running "cool" credit the series has established. The sound is also a hit-and-miss affair. *Tony Hawk* still can't voice act—no surprise—but at least there's real voice acting in the first place. The music is appropriately energetic, but still manages to be really boring since there are only about ten no-name tracks in the game anyways, and you can really only listen to them so many times until you start playing with the volume off. Oh, and you'll also want the volume off so you can avoid hearing your skater tell you that he "got owned" over and over after every time you make a sloppy landing.

Put this all together with fugly graphics—also known as muddy textures and really stiff animation—and a storyline that's bad, even for a *Tony Hawk* game, and you've got yourself a true waste of \$35.

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