

## THE HISTORY OF THE STEREO SID PLAYER

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A number of people have asked how the idea to create a stereo player for the Commodore 64/128 came about. It could very well be a long and drawn-out boring story (moan). But in reality it is very simple.

It all started when I picked up a SID Player utility from our local Commodore Club. It was a very simple player program that would ask for the name of the song you would like to play. It would then load and play the song. When I said simple I REALLY meant it! Nothing would happen on the screen while it played. And when it finished, it would just ask for the name of another song.

Up to this point I didn't know who created the Editor that created the music or if there were any other players out. At that time I decided to write my own player and give it a little action to try and keep a persons attention.

Even though it was very simple, it had much more than the player I had seen. If you were to compare it to the latest version (soon to be 8.0), you could see SOME similarities and some major changes.

The first player had two ML player modules, the Orchestra Sprite file and a Basic program for putting all of this to use. It would load in the Directory from disk and allow you to scroll through the listing much as it does now.

The only commands the first player had were the two Cursor keys for scrolling, F1 or Return to play the current highlighted song, F3 to play all songs, F5 to read another disk and F7 to play all songs starting at the current highlighted song (and there was NO WAY to stop the program other than turning off the computer since I had disabled Run/Stop-Restore. Bad Move). A total of 7 different keys and version 8.0 uses 29 different keys (37 if you count all of the number keys 1, 2, 3, etc.).

When the first player would play the song it would display the familiar (and thankfully no longer used) white screen with a black keyboard. Not much would happen on this version, but the Band would WILDLY flail about while the keys did their thing.

The keyboard was also reversed from version 1-3 (the low keys were on top and from Middle C up were on the bottom) and the

keyboard was even less accurate than it is on 7.0 (version 8.0 now has a 100% accurate keyboard and recognizes transpositions, and we have lost the "Der, what key is dis?").

That was just about it for the first player. It didn't support words, pictures or even stereo.

Now the stereo feature may never have even come to light if it wasn't for one person, John Smith (yes, that is his real name). He is a very avid Radio Shack Color Computer 2 fan and HATES the fact that we sell Commodore computers at a Radio Shack store (we are a franchise and can sell anything we want in addition to Radio Shack merchandise). As far as I am concerned, selling ANY other computer at a Radio Shack store has a kind of perverse justice. Anyway, back to the story, we sell Commodore computers about 30 to 1 over Radio Shack computers and that really steamed him.

To try and put down the Commodore computers and rub my nose in it, he purchased and brought by the store a Stereo Pack for the CoCo (Color Computer). To be polite about it, I was not pleased. So I sat down and started digging through my computer magazines to try and find a Stereo feature for the 64. But as you may know, I didn't find one (gloom and despair). The closest thing I could find was an amplifier for the 64 that would make the audio output sound stereo. But all it would do is delay one side to give a stereo effect much the same way as a Stereo Expander option on an equalizer, not TRUE stereo.

Then came the digging through the tech sheets for the 64. I was bound and determined to get stereo sound out of it. What I found out was very disturbing. It was so SIMPLE to add a second SID chip! I wondered WHY no other company had ever come out with a Stereo Pack for the 64. Did they think it wouldn't sell? Did they think that the 64 community was so apathetic to change as to not make it worth what little effort it would take? From the response I have received I think some of the BIG companies have missed the boat.

There are stereo boards for the Apple, IBM, CoCo and Atari, and they came out fairly soon after the introduction of the computer. Maybe it was because the sound output on the other machines was so ordinary that the stereo boards were made and the 64 has great sound and well...so why fool with it. I really don't know.

The first person I contacted on Quantum Link was Jerry Roth (Dr J5). He was very startled when the OLM came on his screen

about "How would you like to play your SIDs in TRUE stereo on the 64?". He thought it was a joke from some crackpot kid. I will say this, he DIDN'T shut me up and say don't bother me. I was asked to join in the Music Room and tell everyone about it.

Everyone was rather dubious about the program and the modification, but I uploaded the Version 3.0 program and the Schematics for the modification. I have to give Jerry credit, he was the first one to modify his computer and it takes a lot of guts to be the first to open your computer and add a modification that may or may not work.

From that point on it was Version 12.0 here we come! (This is the version that Jerry says will be the most PERFECT and complete SID Player around. Eh, what does he know :D ). The support from the people on Q-Link was FANTASTIC!

The first version I uploaded to Q-Link was 3.0 and all it would do is Bounce each voice from the Left to the Right and back again. In other words when a note was finished on voice 1 it would move to the right side and play one note and the move to the left and play one note and etc. and etc. There was no control of the stereo effects and suggestions were quick to come.

Next was version 4.0 which gave you the ability to control how long a voice would stay on one side before changing sides. It would also allow you to STAMP your SID file with stereo parameters. This would tell the Stereo Player how to play the SID every time it was loaded. The STAMP would NOT effect any of the current SID Players like SID-PIC. They would just ignore it.

Next came 5.0 the first all Assembly Language version. It was more compact and added more features. Word file support was finally included in this version. Also more control over the stereo effects were added.

It was at this time I was worrying over how to make a 6 voice Editor for TRUE 6 voice stereo music. Nick Zelinsky (NickZ) came up with the idea that had totally eluded me. Why not just load in TWO SIDs and play them at the same time? After pounding my head on the floor for about 2 minutes, I said FANTASTIC!

Shortly there after I uploaded a program called Preview 6.0. This was a no frills hack that would load in two MUS files and play them at the same time. It of course had a bug that could lock up the computer every once in a while. Preview 6.0a is currently on Q-Link with the Patch installed.

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From that point on it was a furious pace to get 6.0 ready for the SID-Fest in Columbus, Ohio. Even then 6.0 had many bugs and problems (never rush a good thing I have been told).

At Columbus I surprised many people and converted many skeptics (Even surprised Craig Chamberlain and Brian Szepatowski, Brian seemed to really be surprised that you could playback ANY 3 voice SID in stereo).

It was shortly after Columbus that People Link (the home of Jabba Hutt) started putting up Stereo Files and Quantum Link added a Stereo SID Library section. I was really under pressure to get a WORKING version of the Stereo Player (7.0) on Q-Link BEFORE the new Library went live.

Version 7.0 didn't have all of the changes I wanted (that's why there will be an 8.0 sometime in the future). 7.0 now supports Koala/ Doodle PICs and PIC/WDS combinations, 6 voice music files, many new commands and a BLACK background and new keyboard!

On 7.0 you can toggle back and forth between PIC and Keyboard. If you do this with a PIC/WDS combination you WILL NOT loose sync with the words, they will still sidplay as if nothing happened.

Here is an indication of what 8.0 will have in it. Fast Forward and Pause during music play, on a 6 voice music file you can play the Left or the Right side exclusively, it will display what each music file has to go with it in the Selector screen (P = Pic, A = Ani, S = Str and W = Wds), revamped Title and Selector screens, it will not try to load what is not available, now supports 32 block B/W PICs and many others.

I would like to thank EVERYONE on Quantum Link. If it wasn't for their support and help in debugging and suggestions, this program would have been stillborn. I just can't thank them enough.

*Mark A. Dickenson*