

Pete: Pieter welcome and thank you for taking the time for this interview. Our readers at Winamp Enthusiasts Group will be very interested to read your story.

Pieter:

Thanks for the opportunity to take part. I'm really feel honoured.

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Pete: Please give us an overview as to why and when you got involved with Winamp, your participation with Classic Pro and Skin Consortium, your background before that etc.

Pieter:

Back in 2000 a friend introduced me to mp3's and soon after my love for Winamp was born. As I spend more time in Winamp I started customising it with skins I got off the internet. I remember one of the skins I downloaded was packaged in a zip file and when I tried to install it, it opened in WinZip and I saw all these lovely bitmaps that looked like parts of Winamp. After playing around I managed to edit some of the bitmaps and I was amazed at how easy it was to change the way Winamp look. I was hooked soon afterwards.

My first few skins were mostly "remixes" of other people's skins but I really enjoyed it. Back then it only took me a week or two to finish a skin so I did a lot over the next 2 years. When Winamp 3 was released in 2002 I started playing around creating skins that look like other media players. Since Winamp 3 skins required some programming skills most of my skins were half finished and I grew tired of battling with the maki language. Another 2 years passed and by now I have learned Java programming in school and had another look through one of my old skins again and thought – hey this doesn't look so strange anymore.

My first skin where I did my own programming was again a clone of another player. The coding wasn't very clean but I learned a lot. After I published the skin it was getting more downloads than my usual skins and I was quite chuffed. It was only a few months later that I discovered and joined the Winamp forums. There I found very helpful tips and requests from the community. It was during 2006 when my paths crossed with Quadhelix, Martin.Deimos and SloB. I joined their new site called Skin Consortium and under the new umbrella we released "Winamp 2006" and "Azenis 2".

In 2007 I played around with an idea for a leaner single user interface skin. It was while I was playing around that I discovered that it could be possible to store all the programming for a modern skin in a separate folder and have different skins using it. Since I really like SUI skins and I'm not very good with the graphics side the idea of an easy-to-create SUI skin for Winamp was born. So in 2008 the first version ClassicPro was released with a lot of help from Martin, Ralph, Kev, Alvin Chong (iron2000) and also the rest of the community. Before ClassicPro was released, there were really only a hand full of SUI skins available, but today we probably have almost 100 to choose from.

Martin Pöhlmann also wrote a lot of code for ClassicPro (read the hard stuff). Since he was one of the developers for Nullsoft at one stage it was really nice having someone on the inside that understood the shortcomings in the skinning engine. His developments for the freeform skin engine also helped fix some of these shortcomings.

The next chapter for ClassicPro was with version 2. I was playing around with an interface that scale better. While I was busy with the layout, Veronica Mogni (Veroka) helped me with creating the default skin for version 2. The project then stalled for a year or so and when I actively started developing it again in 2012 she pointed me to one of her friends who had more free time, Victor Brocaz, who helped design the new skin layout. Since I'm not so strong when it comes to gfx design, it really helped having help from a skinner that's really focused on the gfx/design part. Another very good aspect about Victor is that he will be on your case until you see the project through☺. So at the end of 2012 version 2 was finally launched with a brand new layout.

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Pete: What or which are your favourite skin/s you have made over the years and what were some of the challenges in making them?

Pieter:

My favourite skin was Nullsoft Media Player 10. My first skin where I used my own programmed scripts. The hardest obstacle was initially to make the interface resizable so that the user can change the playlist size. My other big challenge was to mimic the equalizer sliders of WMP that moved in a group.

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Pete: What if any frustrations have you had with dealing with Winamp code over the years as various versions were released. Has it been painful to keep up with new builds?

Pieter:

I think I was lucky to only really start with modern skins after Winamp 5 was launched so my modern skins all still work with the latest Winamp version. I was disappointed that some of my very early work for Winamp 2 was lost when Winamp 5 was launched which required more bitmaps for classic skins to be accepted in the database.

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Pete: What is the future of Skin Consortium and Classic Pro? Can you see them continuing to grow in the future? Do you have any new plans/ideas?

Pieter:

For ClassicPro I still want to bring new improvements in the future. As for Skin Consortium I think its future depends on what the next move for Winamp will be ☺

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Pete: What do you do now? Do you still code? What other hobbies do you have that readers may be interested to know about?

Pieter:

Might be weird but during the day I'm a chartered accountant at an audit firm in Durbanville, South Africa. I'm still busy planning (another) comeback so I still code for ClassicPro – just not as often as I would like. In my free time I like to mountain bike to get some exercise.

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Pete: What has been one of the biggest highlights and lowlights during your time working at Skin Consortium, Classic Pro and with Winamp?

Pieter:

Biggest highlight was when ClassicPro broke 1 million downloads. A big lowlight was when it was announced that Winamp website and forum will be closed.

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Pete: What was your reaction when AOL announced it was to close the forum and website and shut down Winamp?

Pieter:

I couldn't believe it since it was still getting enough traffic to at least permit it being self-efficient and keeping the website running.

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Pete: Where do you think are Winamp's strengths and weaknesses and where do you think the player is headed or what do you hope will happen to Winamp in the future?

Pieter:

Winamp strength is its brand recognition and its customization. If you don't like something in Winamp there is probably a plugin or a setting that can change it to your liking.

On the weakness side is the fact that the Windows, Android and Mac applications are all different projects and you can't download a skin or plugin for the Windows version that will work across all the other platforms.

Another weakness is the fact that they tried to do too much and not focus on what they did best – music. The video playback never really impressed me and if it's not the best why include it? The same goes for the Winamp Cloud feature.

For the future I really hope their next move will be to create platform which can run on Windows 10, Windows 10 for phones, Linux, Android, Mac and iOS. It will also be better to collaborate with other service providers than to recreate a service that's already offered by numerous others.

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Pete: If there was a message you would like to give to Winamp fans across the world what would it be?

Pieter:

Let's wait for Winamp 6!

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Pete: Why did Skin Consortium finally fade out?

Pieter: Like most things in life – you have to put in the hours to get results. The administrators got caught up in life. From my side it was nice to have more than enough free time when I was still studying.

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Pete: Why do you think most members left the group?

Pieter: I think if Winamp evolved with the newest trends the community could probably still be active.

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Pete: Do you think Classic Pro is "what Winamp should be if most issues were addressed"? (based on what a lot of people used to say, that Classic Pro is the evolution of Winamp)

Pieter: Yes and no – ClassicPro is what Winamp should have been 10 years ago. To be the top dog now they will have to have a killer interface that scales across all platforms.

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Pete: Any plans on the future of Classic Pro?

Pieter: I have a list of things I still want to do. I got close to a new version a few months ago so I hope I can finish it before we get too far into the New Year.

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Pete: What do you expect from Radionomy / Winamp 6?

Pieter: I hope they can!

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Pete: From your perspective, how would you improve desktop Winamp?

Pieter: Without doing a complete rewrite I would kill Classic skin support and emulate it in the modern engine.

Secondly I would kill the playlist as we currently know it and rewrite it to integrate with the media library.

Lastly I would make sure the UI is compatible with Windows 10 (partial snap to sides for example)

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Pete: Pieter on behalf Winamp users around the world thank you and your team for your participation and involvement with Winamp, Classic Pro and Skin Consortium over the years.

Pete Zawacki

Winamp Enthusiasts Group