



## FORMAT

PSP

## PUBLISHER

SCEE

## DEVELOPER

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## I LIKE TO MUIMUI

# LOCOROCO 2

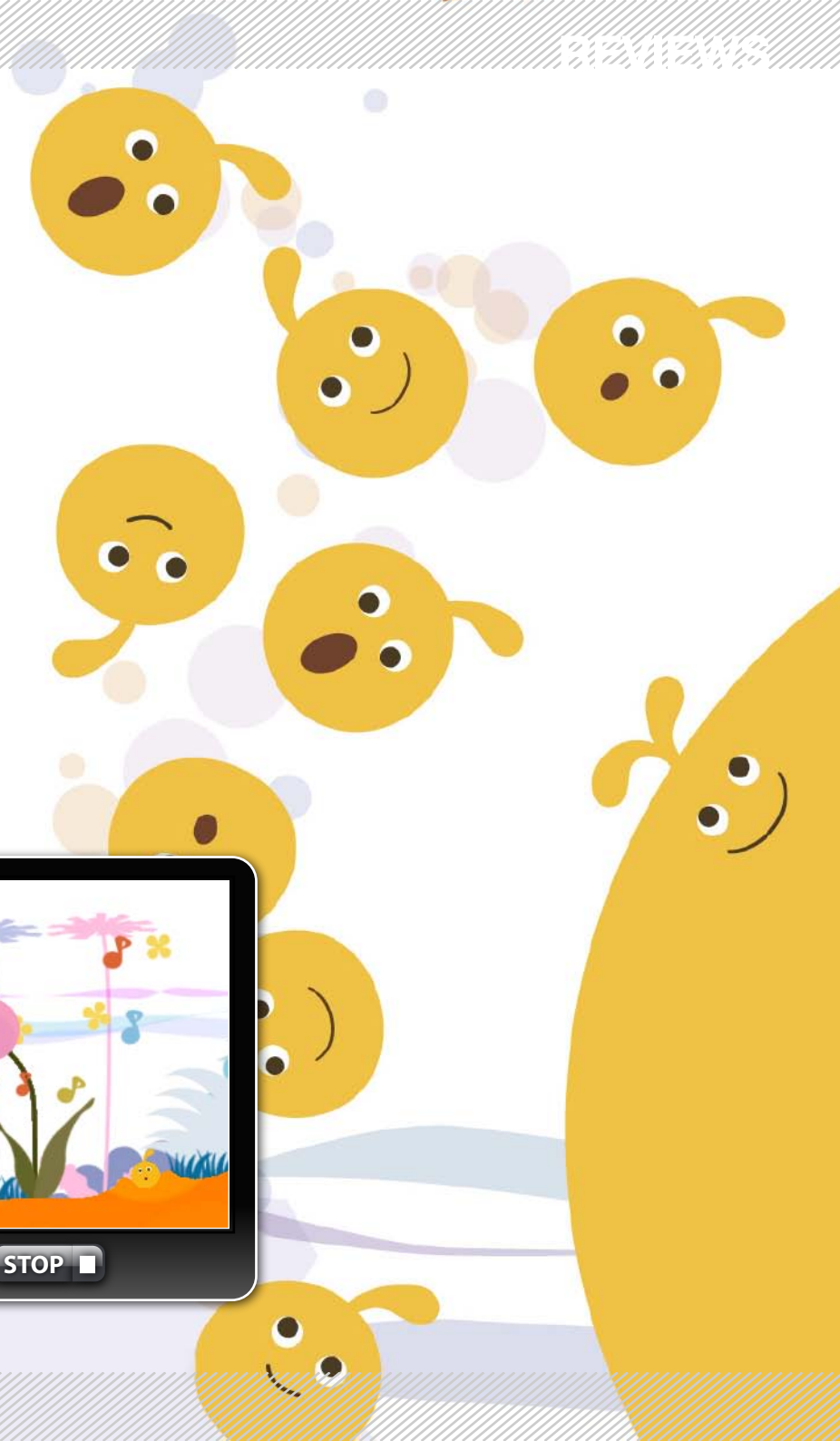
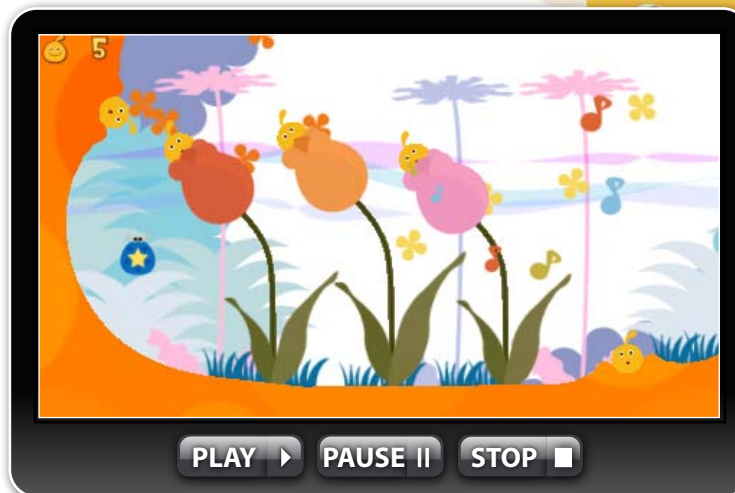
**T**he original *LocoRoco* (released in summer of 2006) was a little ray of sunshine. Not only did it light up the PSP's screen better than anything else on the system, but it also offered a cheery technicolour oasis, a world away from all the ultraviolence and brain training that was going on around it. Insanely cute without feeling generic or overly saccharine, it was a beautiful, refined piece of game design with a Nintendo-esque degree of polish. In this sequel, imaginatively titled *LocoRoco 2*, is there still a spring in the little fellas' bounce or has their charm deflated over time; a little like an overused spacehopper left discarded at the bottom of the garden?

Funnily enough, the first half an hour or so that you spend with *LocoRoco 2* is a little deflating, and it is hard to put your finger on exactly why. Everything looks and feels right; the cast of characters are as charming as ever, and your eyes are warmed by the kaleidoscope of colour that washes over them. It is *LocoRoco* as you remember it, with everything present that made many fall in love with the little...er...blobby things with smiley faces in the first place. The problem is - it feels too familiar; more a remix than a true sequel. Music is reused (though admittedly remixed), level themes are repeated and gameplay replicated. It's still great fun, but with this enjoyment comes a nagging desire for something more; something to make it as genuinely lovable as the characters that populate it.

For the uninitiated, *LocoRoco* is a platform game unlike any other. Rather than controlling the central character directly, you control the planet on which the LocoRoco live, tilting it using the L and R buttons to roll and

bounce them through the various stages. This simple concept, though feeling fairly unwieldy at first, eventually manages to offer a surprising degree of precision with the solid, yet suitably springy, physics engine complementing the controls beautifully. This simplified input method manages to avoid dumbing down the experience, and there is real depth to be found in mastering it. The LocoRoco themselves are adaptable little things, able to split into up to twenty smaller characters or merge into a larger whole and can be squeezed, squashed and stretched into all manner of shapes.

So how does *LocoRoco 2* differentiate itself from its predecessor? Initial doubts are washed away as the game gently unfolds to prove that Japan Studio hasn't just knocked out *LocoRoco 1.5*, having made some great design decisions to expand on the already hugely robust framework laid down by the original.



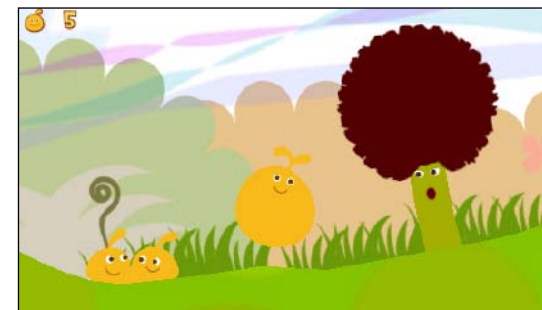
**“VISUALLY ARRESTING,  
A PLEASURE TO PLAY  
AND AN AURAL TRIUMPH”**



The most obvious change is in an increased variety both within and between its level design, with another surprise, another new character or another set-piece rarely far away. New abilities have also been added - the LocoRoco can now swim and attach themselves to objects (such as snail shells) to bounce around the world and break through previously indestructible objects.

This time there is also a greater emphasis on narrative and, while it's obviously not Shakespeare, following the escapades of the LocoRoco, the evil Moja Troop and the relentlessly chirpy MuiMui's does a lot to drive the game forward. One of the best new additions to the cast are the BuiBui - MuiMui who have been horrifically corrupted (well...turned red and had their smiles turned upside down!) by the Moja Troop's matriarch. As mischievous as the MuiMui's are friendly, the BuiBui run riot throughout the game, making an excellent antithesis to the blue-skinned, smiley faces of the BuiBui.

Another significant addition is the introduction of rhythm-action sections, undoubtedly inspired by Japan Studio's own *Patapon*. Requiring a set number of LocoRoco, certain characters and parts of the scenery allow the LocoRoco to burst into song, while you follow on screen notes to bash out a drum-beat accompaniment. Though



arguably not as slickly implemented as it could have been (playing as it does like the most rudimentary of rhythm-action titles), it adds another level of interaction to the game. The number - and quality - of mini games has also been considerably improved.

Like the original, what makes *LocoRoco 2* so beguiling is how genuine it all feels, with crystal clear ideas delivered with impressively slick production values. From its core concept, to the art style and right down to the smiles on the MuiMui's faces, the world of the LocoRoco is welcoming and never patronising. Even the nonsense language in which the characters converse manages to convey their feelings perfectly - the exclamation of surprise and relief uttered by the LocoRoco upon discovering a hidden MuiMui is both humorous and strangely touching, and guaranteed to raise a smile.

*LocoRoco 2* matches the original like for like and does an admirable job of expanding its repertoire. While not as great a progression as it could have been, it still manages to squash, bounce and squeeze its way into must-have territory, and is as pristine a slice of portable gaming as one could hope for. Visually arresting, a pleasure to play and an aural triumph (we dare you not to hum along to the soundtrack!), the love and attention that has been lavished on its production veritably oozes from the screen. All that's needed now is a fully fledged PS3 version - the SIXAXIS is just screaming out to spend a bit of time with the MuiMui!!



**VERDICT** ★★★★★