

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS
- For Educational Use Only -

Wicked Child
from Castlevania

Composed by Kinuyo Yamashita
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1 **Intro**

A Dm i $B\flat$ $\flat VI$

Lead 1

Lead 2

Bass

Drums

(1) - Ties over barlines are used to vary the melodic rhythm against a standard 4/4 beat, creating more interest with limited resources (The NES only had 4 channels to work with). Both melodic and bass phrases are offset from the first downbeat by an 8th, creating plentiful syncopation.

(2) - Antiphony (call and response, see RED and BLUE highlights) is a recurrent musical device in this track. Not only does it generate interest and define the texture of the music, but it is yet *another* example of Yamashita responding to limitation with creativity.

6

Dm i

B \flat \flat VI

Lead 1

Lead 2

Bass

Drums

(1) - Voices come together briefly here to launch into the next section. A subtle detail, but if the antiphonal texture had not been previously established, this brief figure would not sound as distinct and/or propel the music along as well.

10 **B** *Am* **①** *A* *Am* *A*

Lead 1 *v* *V* *v* *V*

Lead 2

Bass **②**

Drums **③**

(1) - The B section dwells on a minor-to-major oscillation of the A (dominant chord). In essence, it's 8 measures of dominant tension. Notes in RED sound out A minor. The bass pedals on A, while the upper voices chromatically pass to the 1st and 3rd of A major (in BLUE).

(2) - More antiphony in the bass (highlighted in PURPLE) this time in the form of three note figures taken from the A minor pentatonic scale. To my ears, this makes the music sound a bit more "cool", a bit more "rock". Why A? Because it's the dominant of D minor, the tonic key.

(3) - The snare syncs up with the bass. Not only does this make the rhythm more prominent in the listener's ears, it sets up the next four measures (in which the rhythm picks up considerably).

14

Am A Am A

v V v V

Lead 1

Lead 2

①

Bass

Drums

(1) - The bass picks up with rapid staccato figures. Perhaps overdone in a different context, but Yamashita needed to use everything she could given the NES' limitations.

18

C

Dm

i

1

2

3

4

Bbadd2

bVI

Lead 1

Lead 2

Bass

Drums

- (1) - A good example of less being more: instead of simply doubling Lead 1 with Lead 2, Yamashita thins out the latter so that it accompanies fragments of the main melody. Why? Not only does it sound more rhythmically interesting, but it leaves room at the beginning of the measure for the bass and the melody to interact in such a way that we hear a tritone (notes in RED) on the upbeats. These "poking" tritones add a lovely sprinkling of dissonance to the music and stay true to the tone established by the soundtrack as a whole.
- (2) - A textbook example of motivic development. Instead of just repeating *mm. 18* and calling it a day (which she certainly could have done), she takes the motif, syncopates it, removes a few notes, and voila - a two-measure phrase created from one measure's worth of material. Doing more with less.
- (3) - Broken octaves in the bass at moderate to fast tempos create the illusion of more than one voice. This was a common technique used in the channel-limited 8-bit/16-bit days.

22

Lead 1

Lead 2

Bass

Drums

Dm
i

B^badd2
bVI

B^b
bVI

C7 ①
bVII

(1) - This C7 serves no dominant function. The chord is formed *incidentally* by the C and E over the Bb in the bass.

26

D C \flat VII Dm i

Lead 1

Lead 2

Bass

Drums

(1) - Another example of motivic development, albeit a more simplistic one. Yamashita doesn't just repeat the phrase - she syncopates it by moving the first note of the motif back one 8th note. This sounds more interesting not just because there is variation in the melody, but because there is variation in how the melody interacts with the accompaniment. It's a subtle difference, but without the first note sounding out in the second measure, the bass and ensuing notes in the motif stand out. This is most likely why she didn't tie it across the barline, opting for a rest instead.

These may seem like inconsequential or obvious observations, but each tiny piece of musical craftsmanship adds up in the end. This track would be *very* boring if Yamashita didn't have such a keen attention to detail - when you've only got three tracks for discrete pitches, each note might as well be an entire orchestra section!

30

C
bVII

Dm
i

Lead 1

Lead 2

Bass

Drums

34 **E** D_m **1** C Bb
i $bVII$ bVI

Lead 1

Lead 2

Bass

Drums

(1) - The E section is comparatively straightforward, relying on the Andalusian cadence ($bVII$ - bVI - V) and an insistent, staccato bass-line to drive the music forward. Cliche for a reason, the Andalusian cadence gives a very strong sense of drama and power to the music, mostly due to the strong harmonic contrast created by root movement via second and the juxtaposition of the minor tonic chord against, well, every *other* chord in the cadence (since they are major chords).

40

A V Dm i C \flat VII

Lead 1

Lead 2

Bass

Drums

Ascending melodic minor

46

B \flat
 \flat VI

A
V

Lead 1

Lead 2

Bass

Drums

50

A⁷
V⁷

Lead 1

Lead 2

Bass

Drums

①

(1) - Interesting to note, here, that Yamashita does not loop back to the beginning of the track (even though it would work perfectly fine). Whether or not this is an artistic choice or a technical limitation is unclear, but this ensures that the majority of the listener's experience with the track is in the C, D, and E sections, with the A and B sections serving as a long (for the NES) intro.