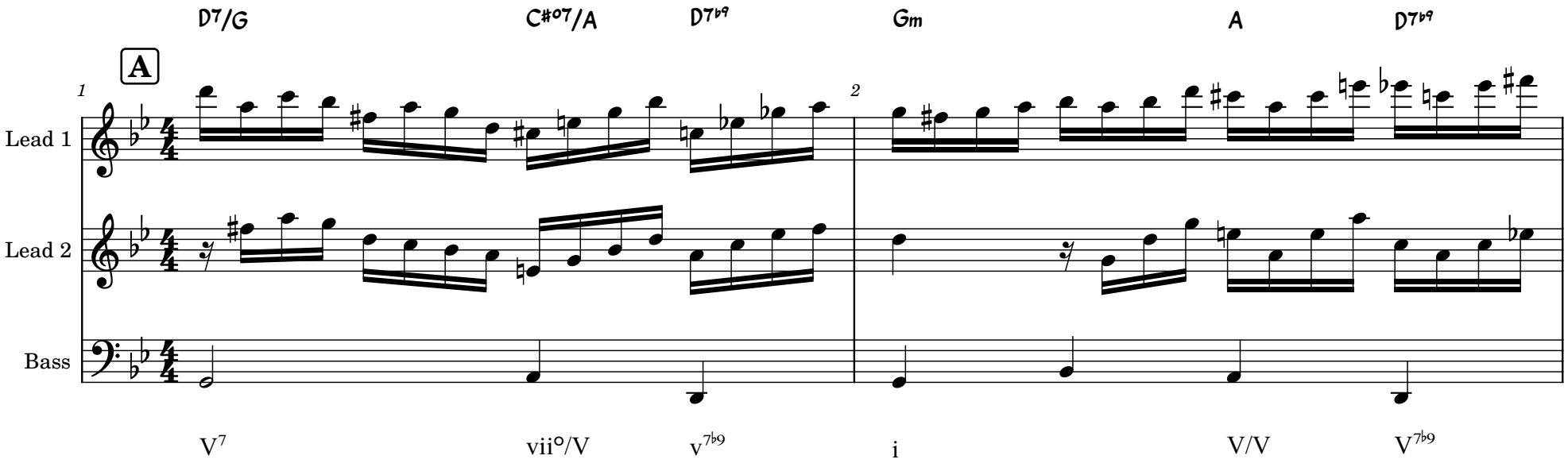
VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS

- For Educational Use Only -

Clockwork

from Castlevania III

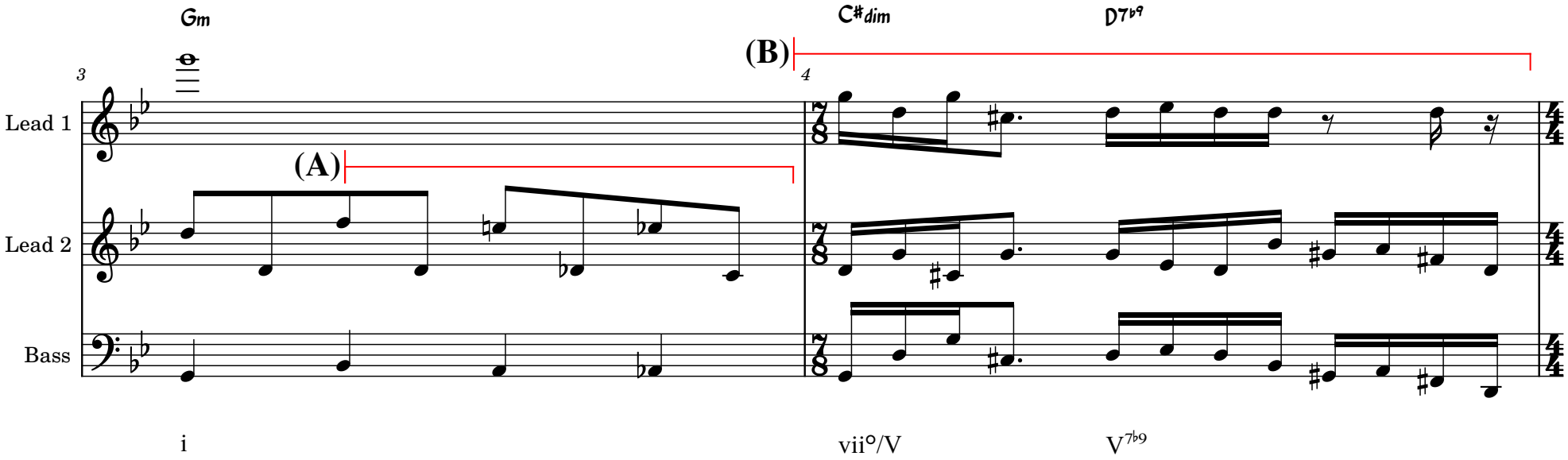
Composed by Konami Kukeiha Club
Transcription/Analysis by Seventh Sam
www.seventhsam.com



The track can roughly be divided into two "camps":

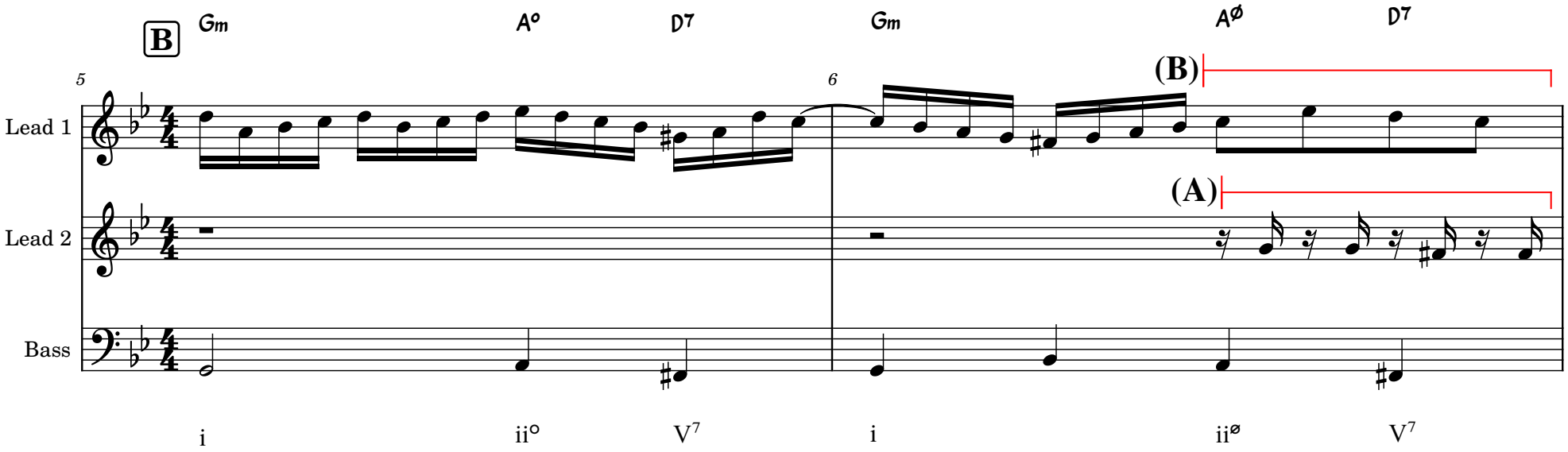
1) The A, B, and D section, in which the Lead voices play agitated, scattered contours that switch between scalar and arpeggiated figures at a blistering pace. The effect is textural as opposed to thematic. Meanwhile, the Bass plays what could be considered the "subject", a simple continuoso-like set of motifs that serves as both the bass-line *and* the basis for motivic material in...
2) The C section, in which the textural, toccata-like free counterpoint of the other sections switches to a highly imitative style. That Bass' role switches to that of a pedal point.

Later in this analysis (in the C section), I'll refer back to the measures in the Bass from which the imitative motifs are derived.



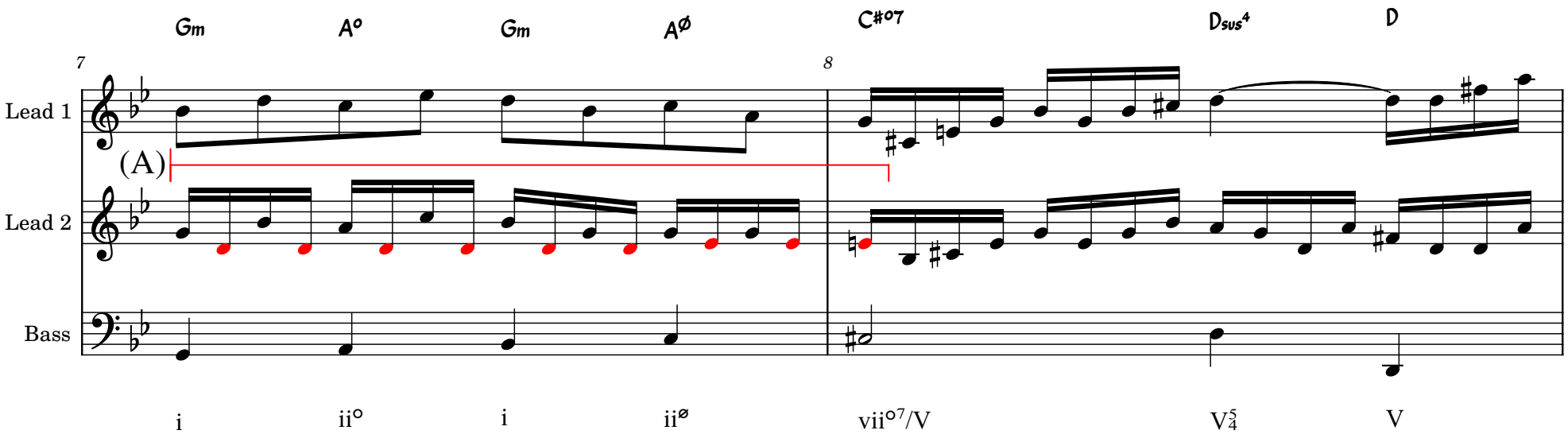
(A) - The NES only had three channels through which to play definite pitch. So, a neat-workaround is found in this measure: in order to let the high G ring out in Lead 1, the composer(s) used descending broken 10ths to give the illusion of two voices in Lead 2.

(B) - This measure of 7/8 truncates the normal 4/4 pulse by one 8th note, allowing for a 3+3+4+4 grouping of 16th notes. The dotted 8th note creates a nice "catch", with the following "release" catapulting the listener into the next section.

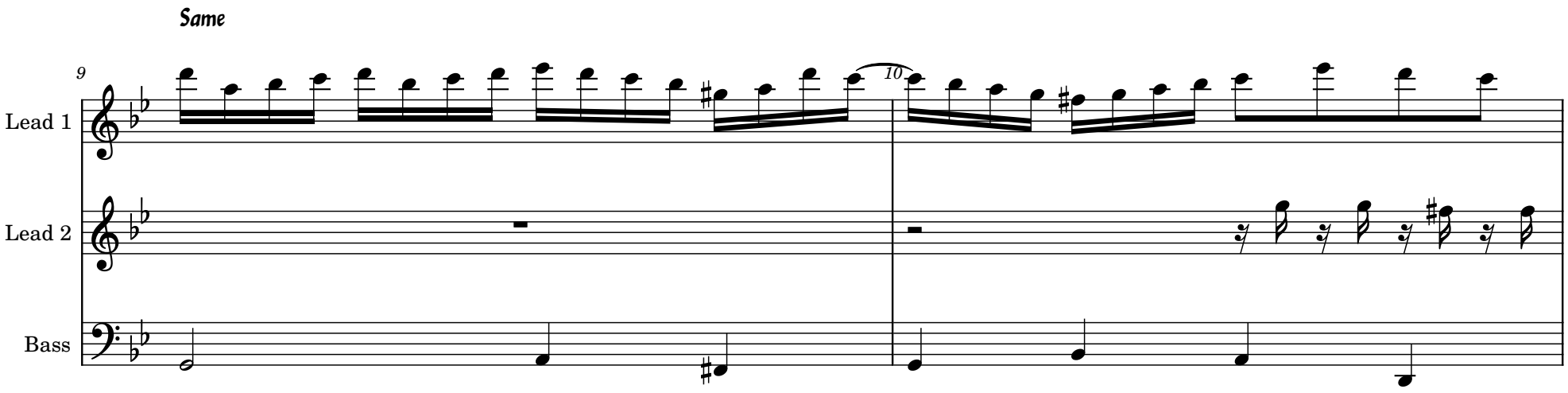


(A) - Syncopating these notes prepares for the implied pedal point employed in the following measure.

(B) - These last four notes are a variation of the bass motif in measure 6. The motif is diminished (duration halved), sequenced (starts on C, not A), and the last note descends by step rather than skip.

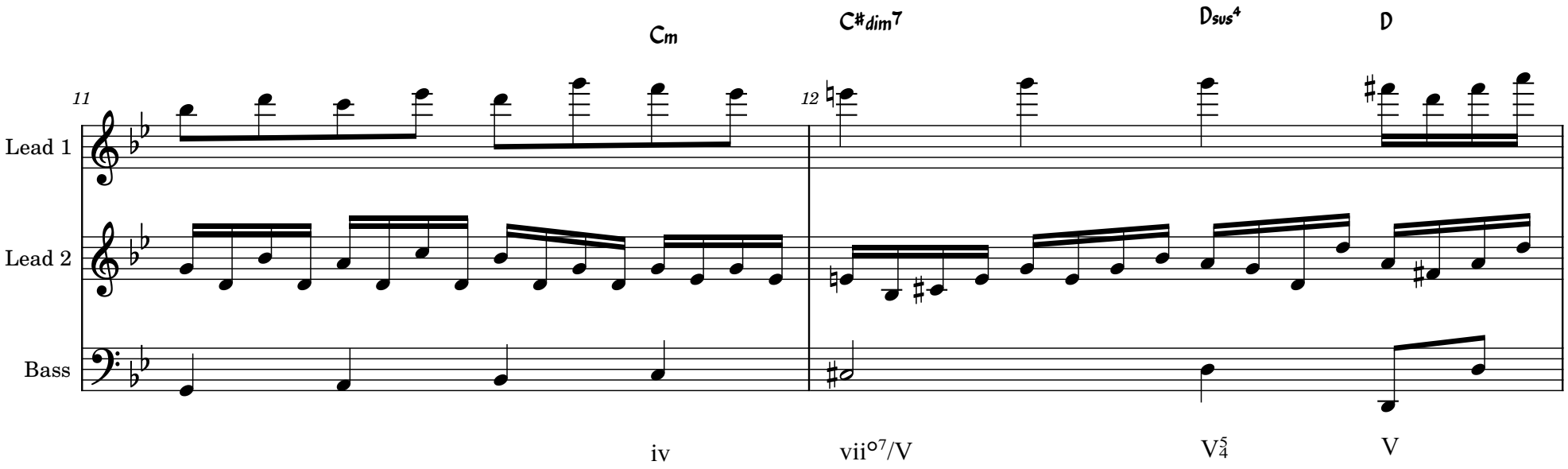


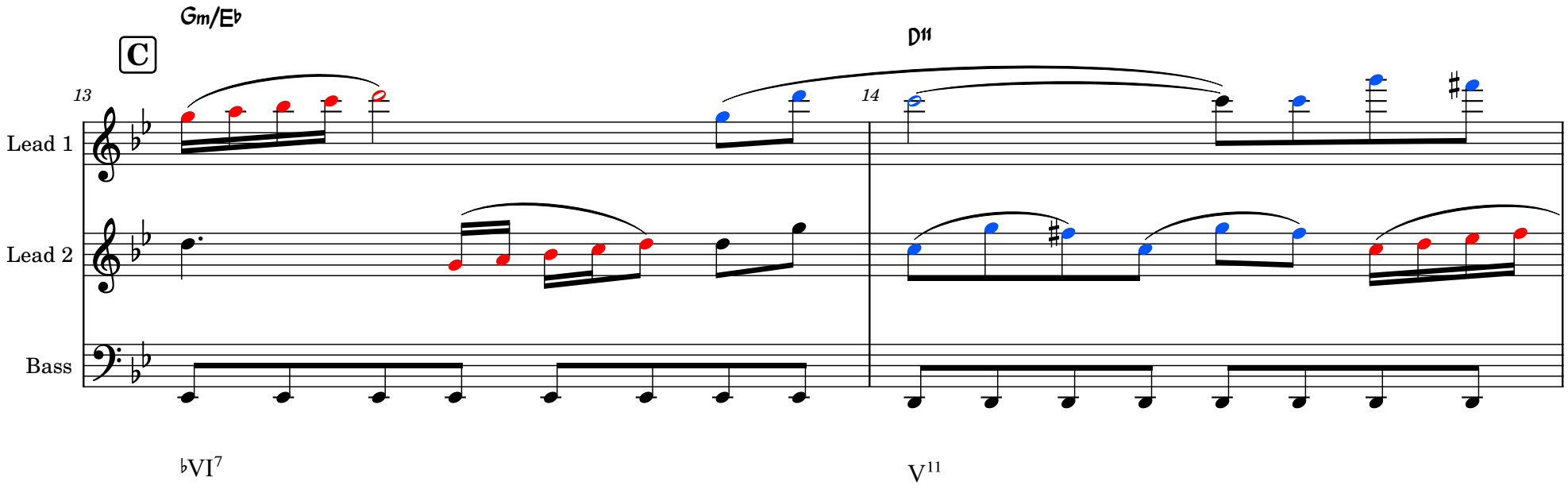
(A) - The notes in red indicate the implied pedal point. Again, the broken nature of the melody creates the illusion of two voices, allowing this "bottom" voice to raise smoothly to E natural and fill out the harmony more than the NES usually allows.



Same

The section repeats, but transposes the Leads up an octave.


Cm
C#dim7
Dsus4
D
11
12
Lead 1
Lead 2
Bass
iv
vii°7/V
V5/4
V

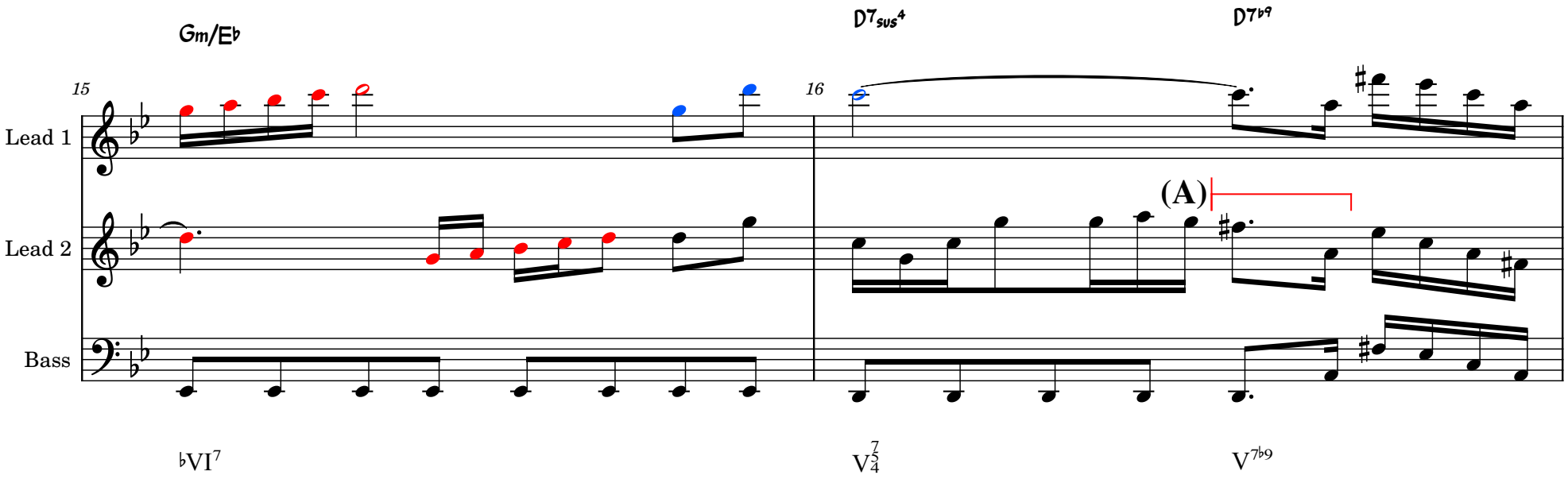


This section switches to highly imitative counterpoint, using several motifs derived from the previous section's bass part.
The repetition of these motifs makes up almost the entirety of the C section's melody, with some free counterpoint flourishes filling in the gaps.

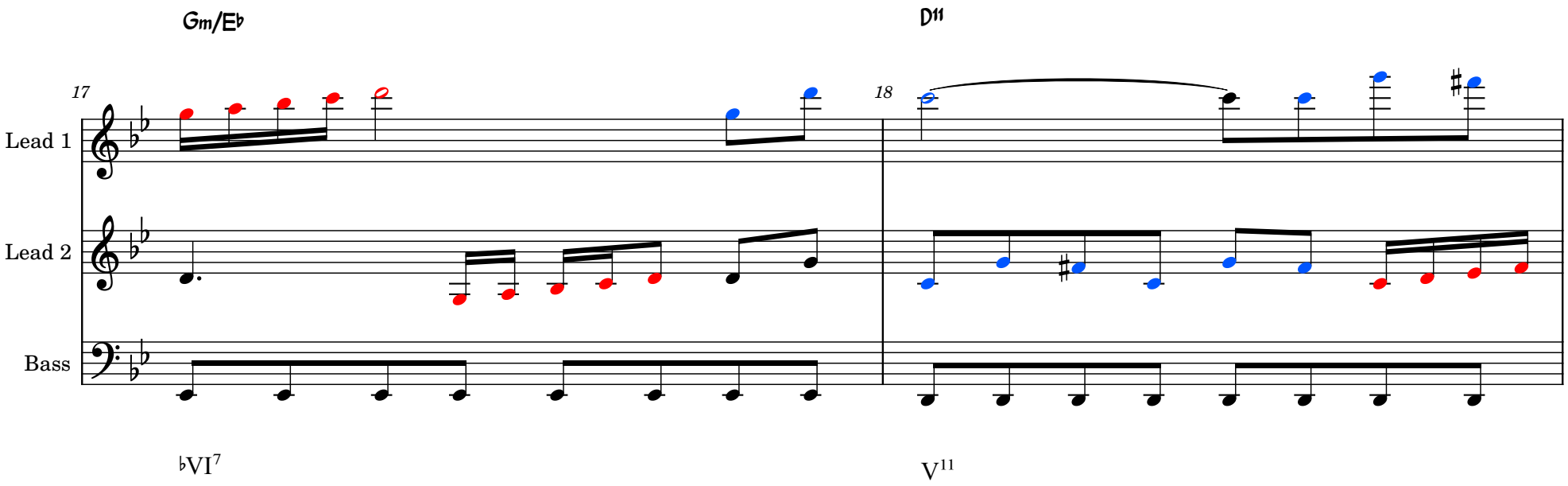
RED NOTES: Motif #1, derived from the rising scalar passage in the Bass in mm. 11-12. This motif is diminished (duration halved).
BLUE NOTES: Motif #2, an inexact retrograde inversion (pitches played backwards) with retrograde rhythmic inversion (the rhyth is played backwards) of the Bass motif from mm. 1 of the track. I say "inexact" because the inversion is not 1:1 - the intervallic steps and leaps are different (even in this section, between Lead #1 and Lead #2) and the reverse rhythm is, well, not an *exact* replica of the original.

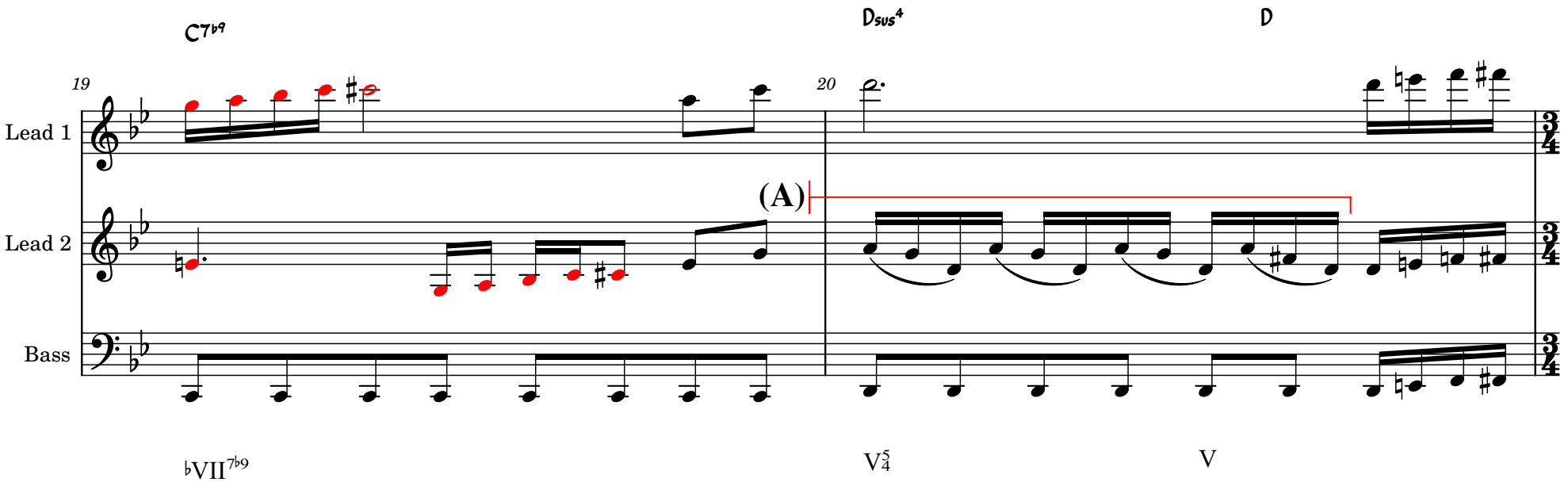
EXTENDED HARMONIES?

- While the motifs imitate away in the Leads, the Bass creates an interesting sound in mm. 13. By plodding away at an Eb, the sound of an Ebmaj7 chord is heard, which creates a nice tonal contrast in this section from the very "classical minor key" sound of the first two sections.
- In mm.14, Motif #2 hammers away at a vamp between G and F#. When placed over the bass pedal of D, this creates a dissonant tension between the "suspended fourth" of D7 (G) and the third of the chord (F#). In this case, we get the sonority of a D11. With the melodic motion, it gives the impression of a sus4 chord continually suspending and unsuspending itself, which I think is a very cool effect (and is what makes this track sound more unique than it otherwise would).



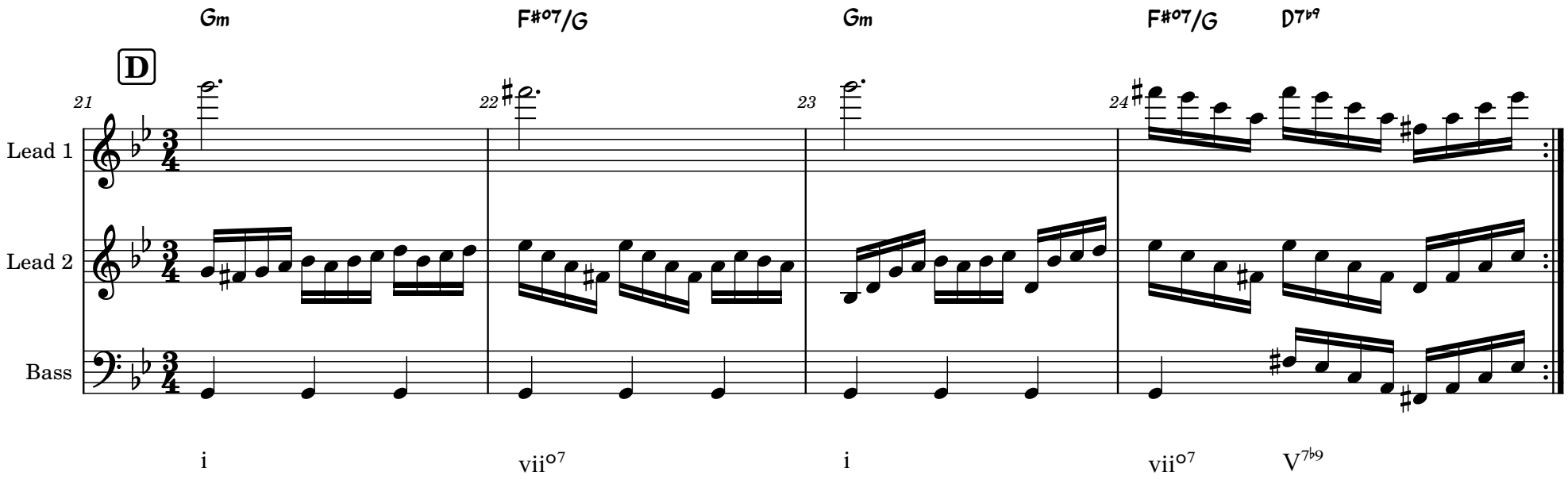
(A) - This dotted note gives a "freeze-frame" effect, halting the rhythm slightly for added tension/interest.
I wonder if the composer(s) tried making this measure 7/8 as well...?


Gm/E♭
D11
17
18
Lead 1
Lead 2
Bass
♭VI7
V11



The C natural in the bass in mm. 19 is an interesting choice. The resultant chord being voiced is a C7b9, but in terms of harmonic functionality that doesn't really mean anything given the key we're in. Of more interest is that cross relation formed between the C natural in the bass and the C# in the top voice. Both voices lead up step-wise to D, giving the impression of a simultaneous subtonic and leading tone resolution.

(A) - The way the 16ths are grouped here (indicated by the slurs) creates a vaguely cross-rhythmic effect of 4:3 against the bass-line.



<u>The D section acts as a bridge back to the beginning of the track:</u>

- The meter changes to 3/4, most likely to speed the music along in anticipation of the loop.

- The bass plods along a pedal point of G, rooting the listener in the tonic key.

- The Leads return to the highly agitated style of the A and B sections, further easing the listener back into the loop to the beginning of the track.

- Nothing less than a V - i cadence leads us back to the beginning, although the cadence is imperfect and not much different in weight from the other V - i cadences found throughout the track. Neither the top or bottom voice leading give anything remotely like the impression of a perfect cadence. This could be seen as a structural defect of the composition, but in the context of the track being part of a video game soundtrack, I think it's intentional: if the music doesn't resolve *too* decisively, it is easier to loop indefinitely.