

# VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS

## - For Educational Use Only -

# On the Beach of Dreams

## ~ Another World ~

### *from Chrono Cross*

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*This is one of two complementary studies. To view the other one (preferably side-by-side), see the link to that score in this score's description. Each of the scores contain this same introduction, but are – of course – different scores with different footnotes.*

Chrono Cross centers around a protagonist named Serge, a young man living an idyllic life in an idyllic seaside village on an idyllic tropical archipelago (known as El Nido), who finds himself at the center of an inter-dimensional conflict over nothing less than the stability of reality itself. The game's creators thought such a heady premise would be best eased into gently, so the game starts off slowly, simply, peacefully. The player is given time to inhabit the role of Serge, to come to know and adore the denizens of this bucolic, vaguely mediterranean utopia. Then, the inciting incident: Serge stumbles upon an ominous portal that rips him out of his current dimension (known as "Home World") and into a parallel one (known as "Another World"). Another World is still sunny, still idyllic, still the same place...with one exception: in *this* dimension, Serge died many years ago.

There is a deep, profoundly unsettling melancholy that accompanies this idea – the idea that one might be in a reality in which they are *not supposed to be alive* – that the game expertly imparts upon the player in these early-game moments. How then does Mitsuda's music – tracks aptly named "Home World" and "Another World" – help to draw the player into this story and make this inciting incident so powerful? The answer lies not just in the musical contrast drawn between the two themes, but in the way they are juxtaposed against the *same* scene.

"Home World" is a pleasant and jaunty affair; an abundance of driving rhythm and relaxing, almost nostalgic harmonies ensure that the music gets the player's head bobbing and enamors them with the beautiful islands of El Nido. "Another World", on the other hand, is solemn, almost mournful. The lively percussion gives way to a somber, slower music that is much more spare, leaving more emotional room for pensive contemplation.

Both of these tracks serve the same function in gameplay: as background music to the world map/travel scenes. Worthy of note, then, is that Another World's world map is almost the *exact same* as Home World's. Without the contrasting themes, the player would simply be looking at the same old island and the inciting incident would lose much of its gravity. *With* the music, however, Mitsuda casts the *same* picture in a *very different* light.

The player begins the game grooving to El Nido, enjoying their stay in this tropical paradise. They become attached to what they see in large part through what they hear. Then, when they are ripped to Another World, everything looks the same, but what they *hear* changes, and it feels wrong. It leaves the player feeling empty, yet intrigued, as if they'd returned to their house only to find everyone they love and depend upon has mysteriously vanished.

The net result of this combination of musical contrast and juxtaposition with the visuals is a very unsettling effect – an emotional gut punch, if you will. It serves as a wonderful example of how music can take the lead in storytelling and communicate what words have difficulty fully expressing. It also shows how the music and other aspects of the game (in this case, the visuals and writing) can work in tandem to achieve an emotional impact that can be far more powerful than any of those aspects could achieve in isolation (in the context of narrative media).

- Sam

**Intro** ♩ = 86

1 2 3 4 5

Violin

Guitar

Harp

Voice 1

Voice 2

Fretless Bass

Triadic tones  
Extended/Added tones

②

③

①

full

$Dm^{add2}$   $Bbmaj7\sharp11$   $F^{add2}$   $Csus^4$   $C$

**D Minor:** i  $\flat VI$   $\flat III$   $\flat VII$

- (1) - The staccato intervals in the harp are doubled by the sustained vocal parts. Since the notes are in the same register, this has the subtle effect of making the vocals sound like they are "pulsing" to the beat. I'm not sure if this was intentional or not...
- (2) - The harmony follows straightforward root movement of diatonic progressions throughout the track, but every chord is "sprinkled" with added/extended tones (mainly in the guitar arpeggios). This is more than stylistic preference on Mitsuda's part: it serves to keep the mood of the track in "pensive" territory, as opposed to "overwhelming sadness and despair".
- (3) - It's worth noting that, in the Chrono series, the world map scenes are very brief compared to other JRPGs. They're interludes, really, in which the player admires the world map's art, soaks in the ambience, and then gets on with it. As such, Mitsuda made both this track and "Home World" quite short and to the point in order to convey the meat of the music with little fuss or fanfare, correctly anticipating that the player wouldn't spend much time in the world map for very long.

**A1**

6 7 8 9

Vln.

Guit.

Hrp.

Vox. 1

Vox. 2

Bass

$D_{m^{add2}}$   $Bb_{maj7\sharp 11}$   $F^{add2}$   $C_{sus^4}$  C

i  $\flat VI$   $\flat III$   $\flat VII$

(1) - Compared to "Home World", this track's rhythmic pulse is extremely straightforward, kept primarily by a four-count of staccato harp plucks. Taken alone, the track's rhythm could be seen as too repetitive/boring, but taken in *context* (that is to say, juxtaposed with the heavy syncopation of Home World), it makes complete sense that Mitsuda would take care to make the rhythms so distinct from one another.

(2) - If I were to guess why this melody hits the exact right mood for this track, I would point to two things:

- The octave leap that begins the phrase is quite attention grabbing, introducing the tension that comes with large melodic leaps rightoff the bat.
- The neighbor tone on the  $\flat VI$  of the scale (Bb) in mm. 8 has a distinctively melancholy sound, characteristic of the minor/Aeolian mode.

A2

10 11 12 13

Vln.

Guit.

Hrp.

Vox. 1

Vox. 2

Bass

$Dm^{add2}$   
i

$Bbmaj7\sharp 11$   
 $\flat VI$

$F^{add2}$   
 $\flat III$

$Csus^4$   
 $\flat VII$

C

**B1**

14 15 16 17

Vln.

Guit.

Hrp.

Vox. 1

Vox. 2

Bass

 $B\flat maj^9$  $\flat VI$  $A m^9$ 

v

 $D m^9$ 

i

almost all notes of D minor pentatonic scale

(1) - The consecutive/parallel fourth movement in the harp and vocals creates an ethereal, otherworldly sound that juxtaposes beautifully with the rest of the musical elements. Combined with the liberal amounts of reverb applied to the track, the overall effect is that of the music being "underwater". Given the aesthetic and symbolic importance of water and oceanic imagery in the game, it's easy to see why Mitsuda made the choices he did.



**B2**

18 19 20 21 22

Vln.

Guit.

Hrp.

Vox. 1

Vox. 2

Bass

$Bb^{maj9}$   $A^{m9}$   $G^{add2}$   $A^{add2}$   $A^{11b13}$

$bVI$   $v$  **①**  $IV$   $V$

b13th of A

11th of A

7th of A

(1) - The IV (major) chord from the parallel Dorian mode acts as a colorful, hopeful sounding alternate pre-dominant to the V chord. It's then followed by an extremely spicy 11b13 dominant chord, giving the loop point a very ambiguous and enigmatic feel. It *technically* resolves harmonically, but in such a way that leaves the listener feeling "unfulfilled" and wanting more. This helps to facilitate the endless looping of the track.