

# VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS

## - For Educational Use Only -

# Fields of Time

## ~ Home 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** ♩ = 100

1 2 3 4

Sitar

Guitar

Shaker

Claves

Conga

Bass

① 3-2 Clave Rhythm

G<sup>b</sup>add<sup>9</sup>add<sup>#11</sup> A<sup>b</sup>add<sup>9</sup> B<sup>b</sup>m<sup>9</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

③ **B<sup>b</sup> Minor:** <sup>b</sup>VI ② <sup>b</sup>VII i <sup>b</sup>VII

(1) - The track - while in 4/4 - is actually composed to the pulse of a 3-2 clave that is clearly heard in the bass line. The clave rhythm, characteristic of Afro-Cuban music, brings the mind of most listeners to sunny, warm, tropical locales; since the track is meant to represent a sunny, warm, tropical local (the El Nido archipelago), this rhythmic idiom is a clear fit.

(2) - This is a strange chord that's being implied and I'm unsure what chord symbol fits. What I am sure of is that it's meant to convey a Lydian-type sound (the chord is essentially the first five notes of G<sup>b</sup> Lydian), and that the root is meant to be part of the <sup>b</sup>VI-<sup>b</sup>VII-i progression that underpins the music.

(3) - Even though the track is in a minor key, the music doesn't *sound* minor. This is because almost all of the chords contain a plethora of extended and/or added tones. With so much dissonance sharing harmonic weight with the basic triadic tones, the mood created by these colorful chords becomes much more subtle, nuanced, and subject to context.

5 6 7 8

Si.

Guit.

Shk.

Clv.

Con.

Bass

$G^{\flat}add9\#11$   $Fm^{add4}$   $Bb7_{sus4}$   $Bb11$

$bVI$   $v$   $I$

suspension resolving

cross relation

cross relation

all notes of Bb Mixolydian Pentatonic scale

(1) - This is an interesting choice of chord to wrap up the 8-bar harmonic foundation upon which the intro and A section are built. Why on earth would Mitsuda choose to end it with a Bb11 chord? Aren't dominant 11th chords considered unusable and uniquely dissonant, to be avoided at all costs? The answer lies in the Mixolydian Pentatonic scale.

*Bb Mixolydian Pentatonic:* Bb, D, Eb, F, Ab

*Bb11:* Bb - D - F - Ab - (C) - Eb (The 9th of the chord - C - is not used in this case)

As you can see, the chord and the scale share the same notes. So, while the chord *does* create the infamous cross relation (highlighted above in BLUE), it doesn't sound unusually dissonant, jarring, or ugly due to the chord and the scale which the melody adheres to being one and the same. It also helps that the chord is not heard harmonically, but *melodically* through arpeggiation. I think Mitsuda picked this chord to purposefully brighten the sound and give it the festive kick that the Mixolydian mode is known for.

9 **A1** **①** 10 11 12

Si.

Guit.

Shk.

Clv.

Con.

Bass

$G^{badd9add\sharp11}$   $A^{badd9}$   $B^{bm9}$   $A^b$

$bVI$   $bVII$   $i$   $bVII$

(1) - The choice of a Sitar to carry the melody is no accident. "Corridors of Time" - a fan favorite - featured a Sitar as the main melodic instrument. Additionally, the melody is - note for note - the main theme from the first game, Chrono Trigger. By bringing that familiar melody and timbre back, Mitsuda is using the power of nostalgia to further endear Home World to the player.

13 14 15 16

Si.

Guit.

Shk.

Clv.

Con.

Bass

$G^{badd9add\sharp 11}$   
 $bVI$

$Fm^{add4}$   
 $v$

$Bb7_{sus^4}$   
 $I$

$Bb11$



17 **A2** 18 19 20

Si.

Guit.

Shk.

Clv.

Con.

Bass

$G^{badd9add\sharp 11}$   $A^{badd9}$   $B^bm^9$   $A^b$

$bVI$   $bVII$   $i$   $bVII$

21 22 23 24

Si.

Guit.

Shk.

Clv.

Con.

Bass

$G^b \text{add}^9 \text{add}^{\#11}$

$\flat VI$

$Fm^{\text{add}4}$

$v$

$B\flat 7_{\text{sus}^4}$

$I$

$B\flat 11$



25 **B** melody implies tonal center and scale of Eb minor

26 melody implies tonal center and scale of Eb major

27

28

Si.

Guit.

Shk.

Clv.

Con.

Bass

top fifth

bottom 5th

bass implies tonal center of Ab

bass implies tonal center of F

①  $A^b m^{13}$

$F m^{11}$

(1) - functional harmony has left the chat...

In this section, Mitsuda does not concern himself with scale degrees or chord functions. Instead, he creates the modern and "timeless" sound that characterizes the overall musical style of the Chrono series by doing the following:

- Two perfect fifths connected by a m2 form a sparkling, enchanting quintal arpeggio in the guitar part (see RED and BLUE)
  - Creating a vague sense of polytonality by juxtaposing the implication of two different tonal centers at the same time (see examples in PURPLE above)
  - Allowing the "chords" to form as a result of the melody and the (largely quintal) arpeggiation patterns in the bass and guitar interacting.
  - Vamping (oscillating) between the two "chords" every two measures, creating a "push-pull" effect that propels the music.
- Note that the chords are so dense and so many notes are implied/represented that the difference between chord and scale diminishes considerably. One might speculate that this is the influence of modal jazz (and, to an extent, chord-scale theory) on Mitsuda's compositional style...

29 30 31 32

Si.

Guit.

Shk.

Clv.

Con.

Bass

$A^b m^{13}$   $F m^{11}$

Detailed description: The musical score is written for a 6-piece band. The instruments are: Singer (Si.), Guitar (Guit.), Shaker (Shk.), Clavi (Clv.), Conga (Con.), and Bass. The score spans measures 29 to 32. The key signature has four flats (Bb, Eb, Ab, Db). The time signature is 4/4. The Guitar part features a complex, fast-moving line with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, often beamed together. The Shaker part consists of a steady, rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The Clavi part has a simple, syncopated rhythm with eighth and quarter notes. The Conga part features a pattern of eighth and quarter notes with some rests. The Bass part has a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. Chord changes are indicated at the bottom:  $A^b m^{13}$  for measures 29-30 and  $F m^{11}$  for measures 31-32. Measure numbers 29, 30, 31, and 32 are written above the staff. A triplet of eighth notes is marked in measure 31.

33 34 35 36

Si.

Guit.

Shk.

Clv.

Con.

Bass

$F\flat_{maj}13^{\#11}$   
AKA:  $E_{maj}13^{\#11}$

$E\flat_{m}11$

37 38 39 40

Si.

Guit.

Shk.

Clv.

Con.

Bass

**Cb6/Fb**  
AKA: B6/E

**Fb6#11**  
AKA: E6#11

**Eb<sub>sus</sub><sup>2</sup><sub>sus</sub><sup>4</sup>**