

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS
- For Educational Use Only -

Frog's Theme

from
Chrono Trigger

Composed by Yasunori Mitsuda
Transcription/Analysis by Seventh Sam
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A ♩ = 124

Flute

The rolling 12/8 feel gives the track a rustic, jig-like character

Trumpets

This fanfare-like motif creates a militaristic feeling, fitting for a character that is a knight.

Cymbal

Snare

Timpani

Violins I

Violins II

Violoncellos

G#m F# E F# D#m7

i bVII bVI bVII v⁷

This track is in G# natural minor, otherwise known as the Aeolian mode. However, as far as we game composers are concerned, it might as well be called the "Adventure" mode. Aeolian and its characteristic harmonies (all the chords that common practice tends to avoid, like the v and bVII chords) are practically joined at the hip with the sound of fantasy and adventure. What better mode, then, for the theme to a chivalrous knight-turned-frog from the middle ages?

NOTE:

- Despite the minor triad as the tonic, an overwhelming majority of the chords in this track are *major*.
- There is *no* V - i progression, meaning there's no leading tone. Instead, the subtonic (bVII degree) is used exclusively.

5

Fl.

Tpts.

Cym.

Sn.

Timp.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Vcs.

G#m

F#

E

F#

G#m

i

bVII

bVI

bVII

i

The quintessential Aeolian resolution: bVI - bVII - i

It almost goes without saying, but the choice of instrumentation is quite deliberate. Frog is a knight from the game world's middle ages, so Mitsuda makes sure that we have nothing but bombastic orchestral timbres in this track. The choice of timbre in this game is doubly important, since the game takes place across the entire spectrum of history. Mitsuda had to be very careful to make sure the music fit not only the place, but the *time* as well. This track proves no exception.

B

9 8

Fl.

Portamentos (shown as grace notes here) add lyricism to the digital sound, "warming" the tone.

A study in contrasts:
 mm. 10-11 ~ leaps and long notes with a downward contour...a contemplative, deep breath...
 mm. 12 ~ ...followed by an upwards, stepwise burst of energy! To battle we go!
 (These contrasts allow the melody to tell a story and make it memorable to the listener)

Tpts.

Cym.

Sn.

Timp.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Vcs.

G#m B E F#

i bIII bVI bVII

If the character in question is literally a bipedal frog that speaks in old english, wields a large broadsword, and champions knightly virtues like chivalry and honor...how do you keep both the character and the character's music from being ridiculous? It's subjective, of course, but I believe the answer lies in the melody of this track. So sweetly lyrical and determined, the high flute glides from portamento to portamento with a quality that's almost impossible to put into words. It is without a doubt the reason this track is considered one of the greatest VGM tracks of all time. I will do my best to illustrate the nuts and bolts above, but - especially when it comes to melody - sometimes it just comes down to that intuitive, unexplainable thing we call "creativity".

13 8

Fl.

Tpts.

Cym.

Sn.

Timp.

Vlms. I

Vlms. II

Vcs.

Second time around, the contour reaches higher.
Without a "direction" for the melody, it stays static,
inert, and introduces no drama...

This note could easily fall back down to the tonic
and resolve, killing all the excitement. Instead...

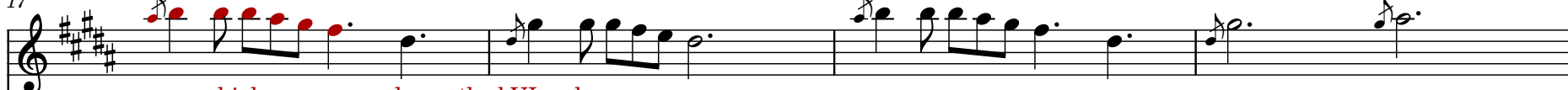
G#m i
F# bVII
E bVI
D#m7 v7

C

8

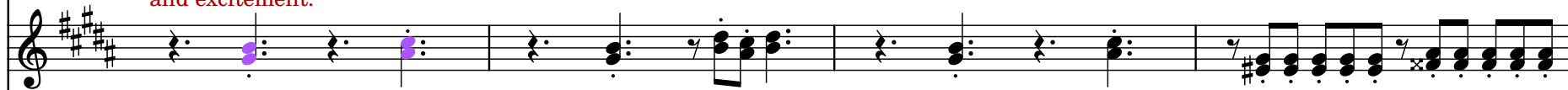
17

Fl.



...ever higher we go, and over the bVI no less.
No resolution; instead, we get another section with even more energy
and excitement.

Tpts.

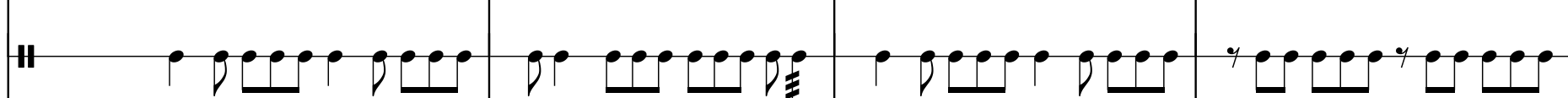


Backbeat chordal hits lend a march-like pulse to this section.
The music tells a mini-story: in the previous sections, we gathered our
knightly resolve and headed off to battle. Here, victory is at hand!

Cym.



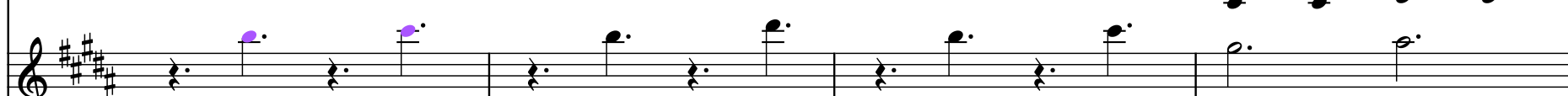
Sn.



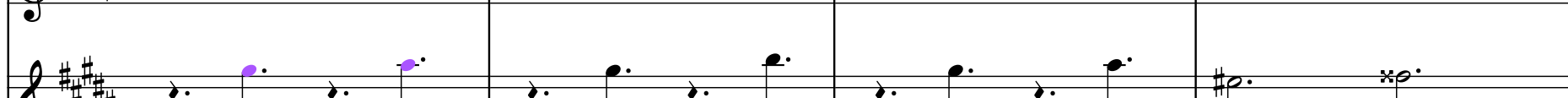
Timp.



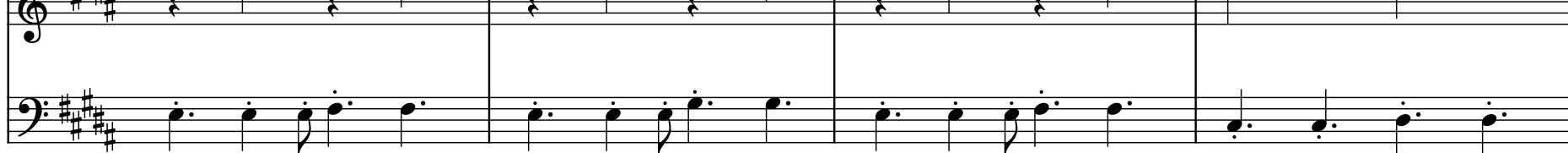
Vlns. I



Vlns. II



Vcs.



E

D#m7

E

G#m

E

D#m7

C#

D#

bVI

v7

bVI

i

bVI

v7

IV

V

A little bit of modal interchange
from the parallel major never
hurt anyone, especially if it's
rising triumphantly to the bVI
chord!

21 8

Fl.

Tpts.

Cym.

Sn.

Timp.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Vcs.

E D#m7 E G#m E F# G#m

bVI v⁷ bVI i bVI bVII i

Wait, that's it? That track isn't very long!

No, but context is important. This is a character theme, and specifically one that doesn't play very often throughout the game. In fact, there are very few scenes in the game where it's expected to loop for longer than 2-3 minutes as it is primarily employed for dramatic emphasis during cut-scenes or other such special occasions. It is most likely for this reason that Mitsuda kept it short, sweet, and without an enormous amount of variation (rhythmic, timbral, or otherwise) between the sections.

In short: the longer a track is expected to loop in a given gameplay scenario, the more variety, length, and contrast should most likely be introduced. On the flip side, if it's not expected to play very long, don't waste the data on something the player probably won't hear!