

# VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS

## - For Educational Use Only -

# Theme of Crono

# (Main Theme)

*from Chrono Trigger*

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**Intro**  $\text{♩} = 128$

1 2 3 4 5

Timpani

Concert Snare Drum

Cymbal

Violins

Strings

Upright Bass

$\text{Em/A}$   $\text{Am}^7$   $\text{A}^{\frac{6}{9}}/\text{F}\#$

i iv ii

## HARMONIC PLAN:

The key to understanding the harmony is in looking at the bass line and melody and seeing how those interact and color and extend the triads voiced by the inner string section. Given that almost every chord in this track is highly extended, the roman numeral analysis is here only to indicate the implied diatonic functionality of the chords.

1) mm. 2-3: The triads progress from Em (E-G-B) to C (C-E-G), yet the bass line plays the note A consistently. This extends both chords and allows for the smooth voicing of the bass to follow.

2) mm. 4 voices an A chord in the strings (A-C#-E), but the melody and bass add tones that essentially form an A6/9 chord, a rather unexpected turn from what we were just hearing.

3) mm. 6 slides the bass down to F natural and the strings play an Am chord (A-C-E). Along with the F natural, the chord heard is an Fmaj7, but the implied functionality is that of a predominant iv chord since Fmaj7 contains the Am (iv chord) triad, which is coincidentally voiced *as a triad*.

4) mm. 8 completes the bass movement by chromatic step to E, the tonic note. The triad played by the strings is Bm - the natural dominant of the key - but the E natural in the bass as well as various notes in the melody color the chord.

By now, you might be noticing a pattern: Mitsuda implies standard, functional progressions by voicing basic triads in the inner voices, and then extends, colors, and tastefully obfuscates that function with the use of extended notes in the bass and melody. This is one of the key elements that contributes to his unique, signature sound and style.

6 7 8 9

Sax.

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Hrp.

Vlms.

Str.

Bss.

Am/F

Bm/E

Em7

iv

v

i<sup>7</sup>

### CROSS RHYTHMS:

The entire A section is permeated by a cross rhythm, a juxtaposition of two groupings:

- The bass and timpani (and later, the strings) play in a 3+3+2 grouping.
- The snare drums, the strings in the intro, and - to a certain extent - the saxophone play in 2+2+2+2 groupings.

Mm. 8 in the Violins: This motif - of a descending major 7th chord in first inversion - is one that Mitsuda will re-use throughout the entire soundtrack. Ex: Magus Battle, Schala's Theme, Corridors of Time...

**A1**

suspension creates extended chord (11th)

	Am <sup>7</sup>	D/E	Am <sup>7</sup>	D	A <sup>6</sup> <sub>9</sub>	E <sub>sus</sub> <sup>2</sup>	A <sup>6</sup>
<b>E Minor:</b>	iv	IV/iv	iv	IV/iv	IV	V/iv	iv
<b>A Dorian:</b>	i	IV	i	IV	I	V	I

### **E MINOR or A DORIAN?**

You might notice that the key is in E minor, but the harmony suggests the parallel Dorian mode (A Dorian). Take a look at the roman numeral analysis and you'll see what I mean. So which one is it?

I would say that it's both:

- The harmony, which is again a combination of simple triads and extended tones in the bass/melody, is pretty clearly focusing around some form of A and D chords.
- The melody, on the other hand, keeps landing on E as if it's the tonic note, starting and ending the phrase on it.

In mm. 12-13, the introduction of C# in the strings and G# in the melody implies E major/A major, and gives a nice, bright contrast to the preceding measures.

**NOTE:** Diminished 3+3+2 groupings make up the rhythmic motivic foundation of the melody.

14 15 16 17

Sax.

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Str.

Bss.

This musical score segment covers measures 14 through 17. It features five staves: Saxophone (Sax.), Timpani (Timp.), Conga Snare (Con. Sn.), Strings (Str.), and Bass (Bss.). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The Saxophone part in measure 14 consists of eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, and F#5, with a slur over the last three notes. In measure 15, it continues with eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, and E5, followed by a quarter rest. In measure 16, it plays eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, and E5, with a slur over the last three notes. In measure 17, it plays eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, and E5, with a slur over the last three notes. The Timpani part plays eighth notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, and E3 in measures 14 and 15, followed by quarter notes G2, A2, B2, and C3 in measures 16 and 17. The Conga Snare part plays a continuous eighth-note pattern of G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, and E5. The Strings part plays a continuous eighth-note pattern of G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, and E5. The Bass part plays eighth notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, and E3 in measures 14 and 15, followed by quarter notes G2, A2, B2, and C3 in measures 16 and 17.

*Same*

18 19 20 21

Sax. "suspension adds 9th" "suspension" adds #11

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Str.

Bss.

Am/F G<sup>7</sup> Am/F G<sup>7</sup> Bm/E Em<sup>7</sup> Bm/E

iv v i v

Again, Am/F = Fmaj7. In this case, Fmaj7 is extended to a the #11 via suspensions in the melody, but the underlying emphasis of the harmony on the A minor triad suggests a (highly colorful and non-traditional) pre-dominant function to the upcoming natural dominant chord (Bm).

NOTE: The G<sup>7</sup> chords are really G major triads resolving quickly to the Am triad (a bVII->i cadence in A minor) The only thing that makes it a 7 chord is the F natural that stays constant in the bass - the chord doesn't actually serve a dominant function as it usually does.

The chromatic, descending passing tone figure in mm. 20 of the Sax is another motif that Mitsuda uses throughout the soundtrack.

The bass line mimics the descending chromaticism from the intro section. Note that in mm. 24 both chords are voiced over E, the tonic note.

22 23 24

Sax.

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Cym.

Str.

Bss.

$C_{maj}^7$   $F_{maj}^7$   $D/E$   $Bm/E$

$bVI^7$   $bII^7$   $IV/iv$   $v$

### **DECEPTIVE CADENCE TO A DECEPTIVE CADENCE:**

Yet, instead of going to E minor, Mitsuda deceptively resolves to Cmaj7, although the "deception" is quite soft (Cmaj7 contains the E minor triad, E-G-B)

Then, to defy expectations even more, Mitsuda proceeds to a D/E chord - the IV of A Dorian - and then to a Bm chord - the natural v of E minor - only to resolve *back* to Am7 instead of any kind of E minor chord.

Thus, while the track is technically in the key of E minor, Mitsuda uses extended harmony and clever, non-traditional voice leading to create his own kind of harmonic function out of "non-functional" harmony.

25

Sax.

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Hrp.

Str.

Bss.

This musical score page contains measures 25 through 28. The instruments are arranged in a standard orchestral layout. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. Measure 25 shows the Saxophone with a whole rest, Timpani with a quarter note, Conga Snare with a whole rest, Harp with a sixteenth-note arpeggiated figure, Strings with a whole rest, and Bass with a quarter note. Measure 26 continues the patterns, with the Harp and Bass parts becoming more complex. Measure 27 features a double bar line and a key signature change to two sharps (F# and C#). The Saxophone and Strings parts have accents in this measure. Measure 28 concludes the section with a final chord in the strings and a whole note in the bass.



26 **A2** 27 28 29

Sax. 

Timp. 

Con. Sn. 

Cym. 

Str. 

Bss. 

The entire section repeats...

30 31 32 33

Sax.

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Str.

Bss.

This musical score segment covers measures 30 through 33. The Saxophone part (Sax.) is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including a triplet in measure 32 and a long note in measure 33. The Timpani part (Timp.) is in bass clef, playing a rhythmic pattern of dotted half notes. The Conga Snare (Con. Sn.) part is in alto clef, showing a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes and rests. The Strings (Str.) part is in treble clef, playing a sustained chordal texture with accents. The Bass (Bss.) part is in bass clef, providing a steady bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The measures are numbered 30, 31, 32, and 33 at the top of the staff.

34 35 36 37

Sax. Timp. Con. Sn. Str. Bss.

The score for measures 34-37 features five staves. The Saxophone staff (Sax.) is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains melodic lines with slurs and ties. The Timpani staff (Timp.) is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#), featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and rests. The Conga Snare staff (Con. Sn.) is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#), showing a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes and rests. The Strings staff (Str.) is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#), featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and rests. The Bass staff (Bss.) is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#), featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and rests. The measures are numbered 34, 35, 36, and 37 at the top of the score.

38 39 40

Sax.

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Cym.

Str.

Bss.

This musical score snippet covers measures 38, 39, and 40. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The instruments are Saxophone (Sax.), Timpani (Timp.), Conga Snare (Con. Sn.), Cymbal (Cym.), Strings (Str.), and Bass (Bss.).

- Measure 38:** Saxophone plays a half note G4. Timpani plays a dotted half note G2. Conga Snare plays a continuous eighth-note pattern. Cymbal is silent. Strings play a sustained chord of G2, B2, and D3. Bass plays a half note G1.
- Measure 39:** Saxophone plays a half note A4. Timpani plays a dotted half note A2. Conga Snare continues the eighth-note pattern. Cymbal is silent. Strings play a sustained chord of A2, C3, and E3. Bass plays a half note A1.
- Measure 40:** Saxophone plays a quarter note B4, followed by a quarter rest, and then a quarter note B4. Timpani plays a quarter note B2, followed by a quarter rest, and then a quarter note B2. Conga Snare continues the eighth-note pattern. Cymbal plays a half note B2. Strings play a sustained chord of B2, D3, and F#3. Bass plays a half note B1.

41

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Hrp.

Vlms.

Str.

Bss.

This musical score page contains measures 41 through 44. The instruments are Timp., Con. Sn., Hrp., Vlms., Str., and Bss. The key signature has one sharp (F#). Measure 41 features a Timp. part with a quarter rest followed by a quarter note, and a Bss. part with a half note. Measure 42 shows a Timp. part with a quarter note, a Con. Sn. part with a quarter rest, and a Bss. part with a half note. Measure 43 includes a Timp. part with a quarter note, a Con. Sn. part with a quarter note, and a Bss. part with a half note. Measure 44 concludes with a Timp. part with a quarter note, a Con. Sn. part with a quarter note, and a Bss. part with a half note. The Hrp. part has a continuous melodic line across all measures. The Vlms. part has a melodic line starting in measure 42. The Str. part has a melodic line starting in measure 42.

42 **B1** 43 44 45

Cym. Shkr. Hrp. Vlms. Str. Bss.

$Bm7/G$   $F\#m^{11}$   $Bm^9$

i v i

### **RHYTHMIC CONTRAST:**

The pulse changes to straight 4/4, no cross-rhythms. This creates contrast in mood between the modern sounding A section and epic, soaring B section.

### **ICONIC MELODY:**

This unforgettable melody instills a heroic mood, like you're flying through the sky on a grand adventure. But how? Like a bird coasting and then suddenly changing direction with the wind, the contour of the melody is mostly step-wise, its rhythm held with gentle double-dotted half notes, only to suddenly leap in angular, unpredictable movements and syncopated rhythms.

### **MORE CHORD EXTENSIONS:**

A standard  $i \rightarrow v \rightarrow i$  progression in the dominant key (B minor) is turned into a gorgeous harmony by skillful application of chord extensions:

1) In mm.42, the G in the bass creates the  $b13$  of the  $m7$  tonic chord, introducing a dissonance that creates a determined, adventurous sound. (This chord could be notated as  $Bm7(b13)$ )

2) In mm 43, the B in the bass of the harp arpeggio creates the extension of the 11th, brightening the normally melancholy sounding natural minor dominant triad.

3) In mm. 44, the  $C\#$  in the downbeats of the harp and melody create a wonderful, twinkling juxtaposition with the 3rd of otherwise mellow tonic  $m7$  chord.

46 47 48 49

Shkr.

Hrp.

Vlins.

Str.

Bss.

$Bm7/G$

$F\#m7$

$B_{sus}^4$

$B$

i

$v^7$

I

The harmony turns more traditional in mm. 47-49 as the music lands on a heroic sounding suspended major tonic chord.

Then, via an ascending 4th motif in the melody (used throughout the soundtrack), it returns to a repeat of the B section.

50 **B2** 51 52 53

Cym.

Shkr.

Hrp.

Vlns.

Str.

Bss.

*Same*



54

Con. Sn.

Shkr.

Hrp.

Vlns.

Str.

Bss.

*cresc.*

55

The musical score consists of six staves. The top staff, Conga Snare, uses a double bar line and has a crescendo line starting at measure 54. The Shaker staff also uses a double bar line and has a crescendo line starting at measure 54. The Harp staff uses a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It features a rising line of eighth notes in measure 54 and a falling line in measure 55. The Violins staff uses a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps. It features a half note in measure 54 and a half note in measure 55. The Strings staff uses a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps. It features a half note in measure 54 and a half note in measure 55. The Bass staff uses a bass clef and a key signature of two sharps. It features a half note in measure 54 and a half note in measure 55.

## Outro

56 57 58 59

Sax.

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Hrp.

Vlms.

Str.

Bss.

Cmaj<sup>7</sup>

bVI<sup>7</sup>

Bm<sup>7</sup>

v<sup>7</sup>

### **ABRUPT MODULATION:**

The track abruptly and jarringly switches to E minor again without preparing the modulation. Furthermore, the "tonic" chord we modulate to is Cmaj7. With a root movement a *tritone* apart, this transition should sound more dissonant than it does. So why doesn't it?

The answer is in the melody:

- The lead strings in the previous section hand the melody off to the saxophone, which starts the Outro right on E. Altogether, the melodic motion is C#->D->E.

- Meanwhile, the strings move down to B, which is the dominant of E minor
- Finally, the lower strings play harmonic fourths (B-E) in a rhythmic ostinato.

All these elements come together to reinforce the notes E and B enough to make the transition sound solid enough.

60 61 62 63

Sax. Ascending A Dorian scale

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Hrp.

Vlins.

Str.

Bss.

$C_{maj}^7$   $bVI^7$   $Bm^7$   $v^7$

**In mm. 62-63:**

Strong chordal weight is given to the notes D-F#-A, which is the  $bVII$  chord of E minor. Thus, the harmony simultaneously suggests a  $v-i$  progression *and* a  $bVI-bVII-i$  progression. Listen closely and you can hear both at the same time.

64 65

Sax. Timp. Cym. Hrp. Vlms. Str. Bss.

$E_{sus}^4$

i

The musical score consists of seven staves. The Saxophone staff (Sax.) is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, ending with a half note. The Timpani (Timp.) staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Cymbal (Cym.) staff is in treble clef, showing a single cymbal hit. The Harp (Hrp.) staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Violins (Vlms.) and Strings (Str.) staves are in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Bass (Bss.) staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The score is divided into two measures, 64 and 65. Measure 64 contains the main musical content, while measure 65 shows the final chords for each instrument. Below the staves, the chord  $E_{sus}^4$  is indicated, followed by the Roman numeral i.

The track ends triumphantly on a *suspended fourth chord*, which is another way to say an inverted quartal chord.

Quartal and quintal harmony are a staple of a lot of Mitsuda's work in Chrono Trigger, and this use is no exception.