

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS  
- **For Educational Use Only** -

**Undersea Palace**

*from*  
*Chrono Trigger*

Composed by Yasunori Mitsuda  
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**Intro** ♩. = 48 bVI -> V -> I = very dramatic motif

Saw Synth

Piano

This track accompanies the area that serves as the "dungeon" prior to the climax of Chrono Trigger's second act. I won't go into spoiler territory, but suffice it to say that this is a very dramatic and important moment in the game, full of tension and foreboding. Therefore, as the game's composer, it's Mitsuda's job to make sure the music matches the moment.

- The first thing he does is introduce a low, almost *growling* piano bass line that firmly establishes the gravitas and drama of the moment (as well as the key center).
- Secondly, he introduces the very compelling synth ostinato. Not only does the *timbre* of this ostinato accurately capture the sci-fi aesthetic of the area, but it introduces a persistent motif that - in the context of a minor key - creates a powerful and dramatic tension/release. See the red notes highlighted above. *Note: fans of Rachmaninoff might recognize this same motif: it's the very motif that opens his famous C# minor prelude (Op. 3, No. 2). It's in a different key, of course...*

#### TECHNICAL NOTE:

In the original, the synth "ping-pongs" (automatically pans) between the left and right speaker/earphone/channel. This was a common technique used in 16-bit music to create a sense of spaciousness in the music that was otherwise hard to create with the limited hardware available at the time. However, Musescore can't do that (yet), so I opted to recreate that spaciousness using a different technique instead.

If you're curious about that technique, feel free to PM me and/or download the score for more details! Be sure to look at the mixer view as well as uncheck the hidden instrument in the Instruments window.

5 **A1**

Saw

Timp.

Shk.

Perc. I

Perc. II

Vlins. I

Vlins. II

Vlas.

Pno.

$Fm^7$

$Bb_{sus}^4$

$Bb$

i

IV

- 1) These misc. percussive elements evoke imagery of clanking machinery, drops of water, and metallic creaks/groans. All of this helps create the ambience of an undersea, domed palace.
- 2) The shaker's accented hits line up with the sawtooth ostinato in a way that introduces a subtle 4/4 counter-pulse into the 6/8 meter. This creates subtle rhythmic tension which helps keep the music *moving*. Since this is a dungeon - and a climactic one at that - letting the player dwell is not desirable.

Saw

Timp.

Shk.

Perc. I

Perc. II

Vlins. I

Vlins. II

Vlas.

Pno.

*Same*

Same

13 **A2**

The musical score for measures 13-16 is as follows:

- Fl. I:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 13-14: Quarter notes G4, A4, Bb4, C5. Measure 15: Quarter note D5. Measure 16: Quarter note E5.
- Saw:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 13-16: Continuous sixteenth-note runs in both hands.
- Timp.:** Bass clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 13-16: Quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3.
- Shk.:** Percussion staff. Measures 13-16: Continuous sixteenth-note runs with accents.
- Perc. I:** Percussion staff. Measures 13-16: Quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3.
- Perc. II:** Percussion staff. Measures 13-16: Quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3.
- Vlins. I:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 13-16: Half notes G4, A4, Bb4, C5.
- Vlins. II:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 13-16: Half notes G4, A4, Bb4, C5.
- Vlas.:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 13-16: Half notes G4, A4, Bb4, C5.
- Pno.:** Bass clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 13-16: Half notes G3, F3, E3, D3.

**Three leitmotifs are referenced in the melody, tying this track to characters and places:**

- Magus' theme (essentially a descending Phrygian scale) is rhythmically altered and woven into the first measure of the melody. If you've played the game, you know why this is significant.
- A motif from the B section of "Corridors of Time" is also woven in (see the colored notes above).
- The quick, chromatic fall heard throughout the OST can be heard at the end of mm. 15 (and beyond)

17

Fl. I

Saw

Timp.

Shk.

Perc. I

Perc. II

Vlins. I

Vlins. II

Vlas.

Pno.

The lone flute carrying the melody creates a striking and (arguably) symbolic contrast with the rest of the music. Every other element of the music thus far is metallic, sinister, shrill, and uneasy. To me, they are illustrative of the obstacles, antagonists, and challenges facing the player at this climactic moment. Meanwhile, the lyrical, melancholy, and *singular* flute could be seen as representative of the player - the tiny human up against the impossible odds of a magical kingdom and a sleeping alien god-thing.

21 **B**

Fl. I

Fl. II

Timp.

Shk.

Perc. I

Perc. II

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Vlas.

*Magus' leitmotif once again*

$Dm7$   $D^b m7$

This six measure B section acts as a bridge of sorts, descending chromatically through m7 chords to the root note B natural (which forms the basis of the chord in the C section).

I find Mitsuda's choice to cut out the sawtooth ostinato and replace it with a flute voice to be an interesting one. He *could* have used the sawtooth for this, but I like the contrast and change of tone created by his instrumentation swap. It creates a "ray of hope" within the music. Coupled with the mellow-sounding minor 7th chords, it works well considering the loud and abrupt section that's coming up.

*Note: there **are** extended tones beyond the 7th to be found, but they are more incidental/passing, created by the intervallic movement in the ostinato rather than being sustained/foundational to the harmony. Therefore, I didn't include them.*

24

Fl. I

Fl. II

Timp.

Shk.

Perc. I

Perc. II

Vlins. I

Vlins. II

Vlas.

Cm7



27 C

Fl. I

Fl. II

Tpts. I

Tpts. II

Timp.

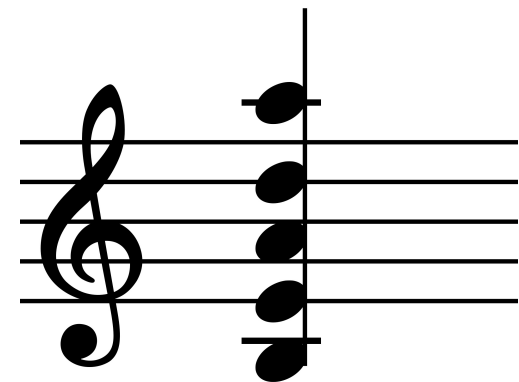
Perc. I

Pno.

This entire section revolves around a massive quartal/quintal chord that planes chromatically. This creates:

- 1) A *stark* contrast with the previous sections, which keeps the music energized and the player engaged.
- 2) An ominous, foreboding mood, as if the player is about to face insurmountable odds (*as it turns out, they **are***). The music is reminding the player that this area is *important*, that their decisions *matter*, and that this is a climactic moment in the story.

Since I have no clue what kind of chord symbol to attribute to this, I've placed an image of the chord's structure to the right. (Note: the B at the bottom is much lower in pitch in the actual track)



31

Fl. I

Fl. II

Tpts. I

Tpts. II

Timp.

Perc. I

Pno.

This musical score page contains measures 31 through 34. The instruments are Flute I, Flute II, Trumpet I, Trumpet II, Timpani, Percussion I, and Piano. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is written for a full orchestral ensemble. Measures 31 and 33 feature a melodic line in Flute I and a rhythmic pattern in the Trumpets. Measures 32 and 34 feature a melodic line in Flute II and a rhythmic pattern in the Trumpets. The Timpani and Percussion I parts provide a steady rhythmic accompaniment, while the Piano part provides a harmonic foundation.

**Bridge**

35

Tpts. I

Tpts. II

Saw

Shk.

Pno.

This four measure bridge section achieves the following:

- 1) It returns the music to the tonal center of F via the thundering pedal in the piano.
- 2) Avoids an abrupt transition by reintroducing some - but *not all* - elements of the A section.
- 3) Acts as a "dip" in the music by winding the player/listener down from the loud, brazen sound of the previous section.

All of this helps the music loop more seamlessly, allowing the player to enjoy the game more and be distracted by the music (in a bad way) less!