

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS
- For Educational Use Only -

Theme of Onett

from

Earthbound AKA: Mother 2

Composed by Keiichi Suzuki

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INTRO ♩ = 116

Staccato bassline gives the music a "wonky", whimsical feeling.

The musical score consists of two staves: E. Bass and Drumset. The E. Bass staff is in bass clef with a 4/4 time signature and a tempo of 116. The bass line is staccato, with notes on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th lines of the staff. The Drumset staff is in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The drumset pattern features a syncopated rhythm with snare and tom hits. Below the staves, the chords C and Dm7 are indicated for the first and second measures of each staff, respectively.

C	Dm ⁷	C	Dm ⁷
I	ii ⁷	I	ii ⁷

A wonky, almost "dopey" sounding staccato bass line introduces the listener not only to the town of Onett (in which the game proper begins), but to the sound and mood of the game itself. First impressions make a difference, and this track aims to make quite an impression indeed:

Earthbound (AKA: Mother 2) is a JRPG that doesn't take itself too seriously, and the music reflects that. The soundtrack as a whole is a massive, whimsical hodgepodge of blues, jazz, funk, and...*avant garde electronica* (to put it mildly). It's another prime example of the delicious eclecticism that 16-bit era afforded game composers. This track in particular is a strange mash-up of timbres and harmonies (although it is quite intelligible compared to some of the *other* tracks the game has in store).

That said, there is a great deal of pathos buried beneath the quirkiness that suggests a deeper message beneath the deconstructive, 4th-wall-breaking, comedic tone of this one-of-a-kind game. The game isn't *just* silly: it's also sincere. Through the trippy lens of absurdist humor, a heartfelt story about courage, friendship, and coming of age is told. It's a very long and involved story, and this track sets the journey off with a fanfare that - in my opinion - perfectly captures this duality between sincerity and silliness.

7

① ???

②

Guit.

Uk.

E. Bass

D. Set

Cmaj⁷ Dm⁷ Cmaj⁷ Dm⁷ Cmaj⁷ Dm⁷ Cmaj⁷ Dm⁷

I⁷ ii⁷ I⁷ ii⁷ I⁷ ii⁷ I⁷ ii⁷

(1) - You've probably noticed at this point that this instrument is labeled "???". This is because I have no clue what it's supposed to be. (*Perhaps it's supposed to be a Vibratone?...*)

If you listen to the original version of the track, you will hear a lovely, lyrical, and almost alien "crooning" sound. This sound doubles the melody (mostly) at the third, but due to its very unusual timbre it injects the melody with such a distinct feeling that just *nails* the tone of the game. I highly recommend listening to the original version to get an idea of what I mean.

(2) - On the subject of timbres:

Suzuki utilizes many "folk" type sounds (Guitar, Ukelele, Marimba, etc.) These choices are most likely due to him liking how they sound, but there's no denying that they keep the music "grounded" and "down to earth" in the sense that nothing ever takes on a grand, epic, or orchestral flavor. If the music did, that would go very much against the tone established by the other elements of the game.

11 **B**

Mrm.

Vox.

Bb Tpt.

E. Bass

D. Set

chordal b9

three notes derived from F Lydian matches Fmaj7#11 chord

Fmaj7 G7 Em7 Am Bb7 Dm7 G7^{b9} Fmaj7^{#11}

Where are the roman numerals?

Roman numeral analysis doesn't *quite* apply to this section, so I've omitted them. In searching for a modern, quirky, and unique sound, Suzuki is using (mostly) diatonic sevenths and extended chords to harmonize his chosen melodies and provide (mostly) smooth voice leading. Of note:

- a) The marimba is melodically sequenced, introducing an element of stability to the section
- b) Meanwhile, the bass is angular, irregular, and all over the place, which *destabilizes* the music in the most delightful way
- c) A chromatic shift (somewhat of a side-slip) is thrown into measure 12, beat 3 and interrupts both the harmonic flow and rhythm, catching the listener off-guard.
- d) The passage ends on a lovely maj7#11 chord. *I guess* this could be thought of as a very extended plagal back to the A section, but the voice leading doesn't suggest anything more than a "soft landing" for the passage.
- e) The drums chill out considerably, allowing the dense harmony to take the spotlight.

All in all, this passage serves as a brief "splash of water" for the listener, introducing much needed contrast, spice, and interest to what has thus far been a fairly repetitive track.

A

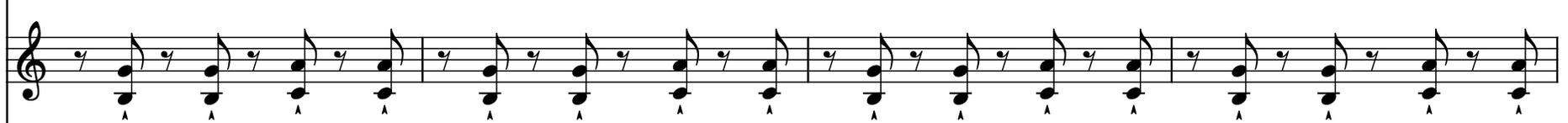
15

The musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is for Guitar (Guit.), marked with a treble clef and an 8. The second staff is for an unknown instrument (???) with a treble clef and a forte (*f*) dynamic marking. The third staff is for Ukulele (Uk.), marked with a treble clef and an 8, featuring a repeating eighth-note pattern with 'A' chord markings below. The fourth staff is for Electric Bass (E. Bass), marked with a bass clef and an 8, featuring a repeating eighth-note pattern. The fifth staff is for Drums (D. Set), marked with a double bar line and an 8, featuring a repeating eighth-note pattern with 'x' marks above and 'r' marks below.

The A section repeats exactly.

Guit. 

??? 

Uk. 

E. Bass 

D. Set 

23 **C**

Vox.

Bb Tpt.

E. Bass

D. Set

Am A \flat Am 7 /G D 9 /F \sharp Fmaj 9 G 7 C

vi \flat VI vi 7 V 9 /V IV 9 V 7 I

suspensions from IV chord

anticipations of tonic chord

Descending step-wise into A minor again.

(1) - The Vox and Bass mirror each other almost completely. This reinforces the chromatically descending root movement. This reinforcement helps the harmonic foundation be heard clearly over the hyperactive trumpets in mm. 24

(2) - Triumphant trumpet arpeggios catapult the music into hopeful and heroic territory. The player is just starting on their journey, and the music gives them hope and motivation to keep going.

27

Vox.

Bb Tpt.

E. Bass

D. Set

Am Ab C/G Bm7/F# Fmaj7#9 D9 Gmaj7

vi bVI I₄ vii⁷ IV V/V V

① sharp 9th accented chr. passing tone F# is leading tone to G

(1) - Suzuki sprinkles some chord alterations in the bass-line to add jazz-inspired spice to the final cadence before the bridge. Even so, the dissonances are embedded in fairly standard diatonic cadence. There are plenty of tracks in this game that "go off the rails" so to speak, but this isn't one of them.

31

E. Bass

The musical notation for E. Bass, measures 31-32, is as follows:

- Measure 31: G2 (quarter), F2 (quarter), E2 (quarter), D2 (quarter), C2 (quarter), B1 (quarter), A1 (quarter), G1 (quarter).
- Measure 32: G1 (quarter), F1 (quarter), E1 (quarter), D1 (quarter), C1 (quarter), B0 (quarter), A0 (quarter), G0 (quarter).

A short, two-measure bridge section repeats the bass lick and mirrors the introduction of the track before re-entering the A section. By making the bridge resemble the introduction, Suzuki prevents it from sounding like the track is coming to a close. This is a simple, seamless way to loop the track.