

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS  
- For Educational Use Only -

# Kefka's Theme

*from*

*Final Fantasy VI*

Composed by Nobuo Uematsu  
Transcription/Analysis by Seventh Sam  
[www.seventhsam.com](http://www.seventhsam.com)

**A** ♩ = 78

Oboe

Snare

Violins II

Cellos

pizz.

pizz.

leading tone (E $\flat$ ) to dominant (F) temporarily tonicizes dominant scale degree

B $\flat$ m D $\flat$  E $\flat$ m D $\flat$  Co B $\flat$ m Ao G $\flat$  F

Key of B $\flat$ m: i  $\flat$ III iv  $\flat$ III ii $^{\circ}$  i vii $^{\circ}$   $\flat$ VI V

(1) - The choice of an oboe to state the first leitmotif is a great one; the quacky, nasal timbre of the instrument compliments the clownish, child-like nature of the villain (Kefka). Doubled with pizzicato in the strings, the mood created is Scherzo-like, telling the listener that this villain is one who isn't immediately terrifying, dark, or intimidating. This is a perfect artistic choice, as Kefka's narrative arc centers around him being continually underestimated, ridiculed, and dismissed in his cruel and sadistic rise to power.

(2) - Snare drums - especially playing this kind of motif - are inescapably associated with military music. The choice to include them here is deliberate, then, since Kefka is one of the generals in the antagonistic Empire's army.

5

Ob.

Vlns. I pizz.

Vlns. II ①

Vcs.

B♭m	D♭	E♭m	B♭m	Ao	G♭	F7
i	♭III	iv	i	vii°	♭VI	V <sup>7</sup>

(1) - The syncopated call-and-response between the first and second violins enhances the harmonic movement and creates a distinct texture that communicates a gleefully manic feeling to the listener. Additionally, notice what texture is *not* created: there is a noticeable lack of low-end, no sinister organ pedals or chromatically rising drones. This is not typical villain music, and that's where the track's impact and power comes from. This playful scherzo-march accompanies some of the most horrific acts a 16-bit villain has ever committed: poisoning an entire kingdom, burning down an orphanage while everyone is still inside, attempting genocide, enslaving an entire race, etc., etc. That juxtaposition - that decision to make the music a glimpse into the mind of a madman - is what makes this track so memorable and effective.

**B**

7

Fl.

Ob.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Vcs.

arco

arco

arco

Chromatic appoggiatura of E $\flat$  -> F emphasizes the  $\flat$ V degree of the scale.

2

1

B $\flat$ m      A $\flat$ 7      B $\flat$ m      G $\flat$ M7 Fm/M7( $\flat$ 13)      G $\flat$       G $\flat$ 7      G $\flat$       G $\flat$ ( $\flat$ 5)

i       $\flat$ VII<sup>7</sup>      i       $\flat$ VI<sup>7</sup>      v?       $\flat$ VI

(1) - If the music is playful, boisterous, etc. then how does Uematsu still communicate that the character is a villain? By using dissonant harmonies like this m/maj7( $\flat$ 13). Startling dissonances and untraditional harmonies within a traditional framework help communicate to the listener that there's something *a bit off*. And in Kefka's case, there's a **lot** that's off...

(2) - Even when the strings play *arco*, the articulative quality of the track is primarily staccato. The lack of flowing melodies and long notes make everything feel abrupt, sharp, and pointed; this, in turn, gives the character of Kefka those qualities.

# Bridge

11

Fl.

Bsns.

Tpts.

Timp.

Cym.

Hrp.

Vlms. I

Vlms. II

Vcs.

7th of F7

3rd of F7 (and leading tone)

chordal 9th

C

F Bbm ? ① Bbm Ab9 Bbm Bbo

V i V<sup>7</sup> i bVII<sup>9</sup> i CT<sup>o</sup>

NOTES ON THIS SECTION ON NEXT PAGE ->

14

Bsns.

Tpts.

Timp.

Cym.

Hrp.

Vlins. I

Vcs.

②

cymbal rests to help listener hear everything else going on in beat 4

resolution to tonic is Gb -> Bb  
NOT F -> Bb  
resolution by M3 instead of P4  
non-traditional in traditional framework

Gb                      Bb o/F                      Gb

bVI                      CT°                      bVI

(1) - While there is no root of the dominant seventh chord (F) present in beats 3 and 4 of mm. 11, the nature of the voice leading coupled with the F heard so prominently at the beginning of the measure make these notes more-or-less dominant function.

(2) - The timpani (doubled with cellos), the frequent cymbal crashes, and the blaring trumpets all combine to propel the music into march territory. This creates a stark contrast with the lighter A and B sections. At first, the music was playful and manic. Now there is weight and power behind it, though it retains that mania that was introduced. This mirrors Kefka's arc: he begins the game as little more than a nuisance, but grows to become a literal god that tortures the entire world for fun. By mirroring that arc, this track is helping to tell Kefka's story.

16

Bsns.

Tpts.

Timp.

Cym.

Hrp.

Vlns. I

Vcs.

Same

Same

**The B section repeats exactly**

18

Bridge

This musical score page contains measures 18, 19, and 20 of a bridge section. The score is written for a full orchestra and includes the following parts: Flute (Fl.), Bassoons (Bsns.), Trumpets (Tpts.), Timpani (Timp.), Cymbals (Cym.), Harp (Hrp.), Violins I (Vlns. I), Violins II (Vlns. II), and Vocals (Vcs.). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is not explicitly shown but appears to be 4/4 based on the notation. Measure 18 features a flute rest, a woodwind melody, a trumpet melody, a timpani line, cymbal hits, a harp arpeggio, and a violin I melody. Measure 19 continues the woodwind and trumpet melodies, with the harp playing a sustained chord. Measure 20 is the final measure of the bridge, featuring a flute entry with a trill, a woodwind melody, a trumpet melody, a timpani line, cymbal hits, a harp rest, and violin I and II entries. The vocal part is present in measure 20 but has no notation.

Fl.

Bsns.

Tpts.

Timp.

Cym.

Hrp.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Vcs.



21 **D** ①

Fl.

Bsns.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Vcs.

Bbm Ao Bbm Ao Bbm F7 Bbm7 Gbmaj7 Gb7

i vii° i vii° i V7 i7 bVI7

(1) - The D section thins the music out and re-introduces the playful, skulking nature of the A and B sections. Uematsu then builds up to a flowing, poignant contrapuntal phrase in mm. 23-24 and ends the phrase on a very dramatic sounding major seventh chord. These measures are a brief but striking contrast to the rest of the track. They paint quite a different picture, one that has hints of sadness and vulnerability. It's almost as if the music is hinting at an emptiness and sorrow that could be underneath the layers of cruelty and nihilism that Kefka personifies. This is subtle but effective musical storytelling and it serves to flesh the character of Kefka out in a way that the dialogue and plot do not. And then - in mm. 25-26 - the glimpse passes as a chromatic slide to a dominant seventh chord that doesn't quite resolve plants the listener right back into the sinister, off-kilter nature of the track proper.