

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

# **Phantom Train**

*from Final Fantasy VI*

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

Guitar

1 A ♩. = 52

Em Bm7 Em Am Em F Em Em D C B7 B7<sub>sus</sub><sup>4</sup> E

i v<sup>7</sup> i iv i bII i i bVI V<sup>7</sup> I

The A section features a solemn, pensive guitar plucking the melody of the track.

Almost measure for measure, the mode from which the chords are derived switches between Aeolian and Phrygian:

- In measure one, you have the *natural* minor seventh chord on the second beat. This gives the harmony Aeolian's signature melancholic character.
- In measure 3, you have the bII (also known as the Neapolitan in common practice parlance). This chord, in juxtaposition with the tonic (minor) chord, creates a real sense of tension and yearning.
- In measures 5 thru 7, Uematsu utilizes the Andalusian cadence (bVII->bVI->V), a very common Aeolian cadence that has a very serious, dramatic quality to it.
- In measure 8, a little twist with a Picardy Third, in which the suspended dominant 7th chord resolves to the *major* tonic chord even though the track is in a *minor* key. It's clear that, in using this musical device, Uematsu is...wait for it...going for Ba-roque<sup>imsorryihadto...</sup>

This section's textbook use of modal interchange is an example of the composer taking various common harmonic devices and, instead of limiting themselves to the supposed restrictions of one mode or scale, freely mixing them until they compliment the exact musical effect they are after.

9 **B** 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

Brass

Con. Sn.

Timp.

Vlms.

Vlas.

Vcs.

Cbs.

Em F<sup>9</sup> Em C<sup>9</sup> Em B<sup>7</sup> Em Em B<sup>7</sup> E<sup>o</sup> Cm<sup>7</sup> E<sup>o</sup> G<sup>o</sup> Em

i bII<sup>9</sup> i bVI<sup>9</sup> i V<sup>7</sup> i i V<sup>7</sup> CT<sup>o</sup> bvi<sup>7</sup> CT<sup>o</sup> bII<sup>o</sup> i

The lonely guitar gives way to strings, brass and percussion as the melody restates itself, fully fleshed out by the orchestra and re-harmonized for an entirely different emotional feel.

In measures 9 and 10, Uematsu uses dominant 9th chords in non-dominant functions, creating what I can only describe as a "smoky", "hazy", and "gritty" sound. Combined with the use of the b5 note (highlighted in blue) borrowed from the minor blues scale, this section of the music takes on a threatening, yet suave tone. This is further amplified by the clever voice leading in measure 15 which leads to two half-diminished chords in succession resolving un-traditionally to the tonic.

All these no-traditional usages of already quite ambiguous chords create a uniquely dark and cool sound, one that Uematsu uses to great effect in other dungeon tracks in FF6 (Zozo, Magitek Factory, Narshe Caverns, etc.)

The musical score consists of seven staves for different instruments: Brass, Con. Sn., Timp., Vlins., Vlas., Vcs., and Cbs. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score spans measures 17 to 24. The Brass staff has a melodic line with various intervals and rests. The Con. Sn. staff shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes with rests. The Timp. staff has a simple rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and rests. The Vlins. staff has a melodic line with various intervals and rests. The Vlas. staff has a melodic line with various intervals and rests. The Vcs. staff has a melodic line with various intervals and rests. The Cbs. staff has a melodic line with various intervals and rests. Below the staves is a chord progression table.

Em	F <sup>9</sup>	Em	C <sup>9</sup>	Em	B <sup>7</sup>	Em	Em	B <sup>7</sup>	E <sup>o</sup>	Cm <sup>7</sup>	E <sup>o</sup>	G <sup>o</sup>	Em
i	bII <sup>9</sup>	i	bVI <sup>9</sup>	i	V <sup>7</sup>	i	i	V <sup>7</sup>	CT <sup>o</sup>	bvi <sup>7</sup>	CT <sup>o</sup>	bII <sup>o</sup>	i

- It's notable that Uematsu chose to give the melodic focus to the Brass in this section. Since the harmony is most blues-esque in this section, the brass sound helps give the piece a more "big band" feel, amplifying that "smoky speak-easy" feel.

- Also of note is the use of the snare drums. They seem out of place, but they give the vague impression of running train cars. However, that ambient sound is *also* playing during this point in the game, so I am not entirely sure this was the intent behind the snare drum's inclusion.

- I particularly like the effect Uematsu creates by giving the Doublebasses the rising melodic minor figure (i.e. measure 20) while everything else is silent. The extreme contrast between tutti and single instrument scoring has an almost comedic effect, further refining the tone of the track and keeping the listener off-balance and intrigued.

25 **C** 26 27 28

Brass

Fl.

Con. Sn.

Timp.

Vlms.

Vlas.

Vcs.

Cbs.

Em C7 B D#7 Em Bm/maj

i bVI<sup>7</sup> V VII<sup>7</sup> i ?

The C section takes a much more classical, formal tone, both in instrumentation and harmony.

- The addition of a flute adds some lightness to the otherwise heavy, plodding sound.

- While not without its oddities (the D#7 chord and the Bm/maj triad), the chord progression retains a the common classical era framework of tonic, pre-dominant, dominant. In this case, Em (tonic) -> C7 (bVI or German Augmented Sixth, pre-dominant) -> B (dominant).

- The Bm/maj triad is not commonly labeled as such, but I am not sure what else it could be called. The important take-away is that Uematsu wanted the dissonance created by sounding a major and minor third at the same time.

29 30 31 32

Brass

Fl.

Con. Sn.

Timp.

Vlns.

Vlas.

Vcs.

Cbs.

Em C7 B E

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

Things get even more classical as the progression follows a simple i ->  $\flat$ VI -> V -> i cadence.

The rhythm maintains a waltz-like gait; the listener can almost imagine the spirits on the train stepping in time to the music, dancing the afterlife away.

The brass takes a backseat to the strings as the violins and violas take over the melodic spotlight. Strings are much more "classical sounding" than brass, so this change in instrumentation helps the transition from a "big band" feel to a "chamber music" feel.