

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS
- For Educational Use Only -

Terra's Theme

from

Final Fantasy VI

Composed by Nobuo Uematsu
Transcription/Analysis by Seventh Sam
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Intro ♩ = 80

Flute

Snare Drum

Guitar

Violins I

Violins II

Bass

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

arco

cresc.

G#m

i

Despite the title, this track is more than just a character's theme music. It serves two greater purposes in helping tell the story of Final Fantasy VI:

- It serves as the overworld/field theme for a good portion of the game. For those unfamiliar, this is the music that accompanies the player during scenes of travel across vast distances.
- It serves as the main theme of the game itself; specifically, the main theme of the protagonists, one of whom is the character Terra.

Final Fantasy VI is a sprawling epic with an ensemble cast and an enormous amount of inter-weaving plotlines. However, at its core, the story is about a fundamental human conflict: that of hope versus despair, kindness versus cruelty, willingness to live versus suicidal nihilism. This duality is represented by the protagonists and antagonists, respectively, and thus the game has two "overtures".

The **first** belongs to the antagonists, and is heard as the game boots up during the title screen: a terrifying organ crescendo and dissonant choral wail. The **second** is this theme, which is first heard during the opening credits as the player begins a brand new game. This one belongs to the protagonists, and thus it is this theme's job to capture the emotional weight of their collective plight.

3

Fl. **A1**

Sn. ① **first phrase, downward contour: "the road ahead is long and full of grave dangers"**

Hrp. ②

Vlins. I chordal 7th

Vlins. II

Bass pizz. ③

G#m D#m7

i v⁷

(1) - The flute part plays the iconic lietmotif. The melody achieves its lyrical power primarily by featuring long, sustained notes that are juxtaposed against the busier motion of the accompaniment. By keeping the melody the "simplest", Uematsu is drawing attention to it and giving it a lot of weight.

(2) - Uematsu keeps the rhythm of the track simple with a straightforward snare drum ostinato. This ostinato is rhythmically doubled by the bass and the harp strums. The reason for this kind of rhythm is clear: both the timbre of the snare drums and the nature of the rhythm itself are highly evocative of marches, parades, and other forms of "moving" music that the listener cannot help but associate with people physically marching. Since the music accompanies travel over long distance, this is a perfect fit.

(3) - Uematsu keeps the harmony relatively simple as well. Two things to note:

- He does *not* opt for a dominant seventh chord, but rather the natural *minor* seventh. This "softens" the resolution to the tonic, resulting in a more mellow, pensive sound.

- He deliberately voices the seventh of the chord (F#) in the highest string voice, thus accentuating the dissonance. Why? Because a minor seventh chord sounds much less "unrelentingly sad" than a simple minor triad.

second phrase, upwards contour: "it may be a long road, but maybe there's hope..."

G#m
i

D#m7
v⁷

Not all melodic material is ideal for leitmotif/thematic purposes. So what makes *this* one work so well as a main theme?

1. Logical Contour

The contour of the melody makes sense to our ears; it travels to and from a destination, rising and falling at important moments of the phrases in order to tell a subtle, musical story. See the slur markings and accompanying text to see how I personally interpret - in words - what the melody's contour communicates. Notice how the contour of the melody is fine-tuned in order to leave the player feeling daunted yet determined - *just like the character of Terra*

2. Lyricism

The melody is easily hummed, sung, whistled, etc. Melodies that are sing-able are far more memorable than those that aren't, for a variety of reasons that are beyond the scope of this analysis. Suffice it to say that the more memorable a melody is, the more effective it is at tying elements of a story together since the listener will remember the melody and thus more easily associate it with the character, place, or idea it accompanies.

7 5

third phrase, downward contour but sequenced up to a higher scale degree: "yes, if we believe there is hope, we can win!"

B F#

\flat III \flat VII

CONTINUATION FROM PREVIOUS PAGE:

3. Motivic Simplicity

The entire melody is made up of small, simple melodic units that can easily be swapped out, modified, etc. This allows portions of the theme to be referenced in countless other tracks, lending the soundtrack a great deal of thematic cohesiveness. It also allows the melody to be reharmonized countless ways with very little change to the melody's structure itself. If you take a look at the two measures above (mm. 7-8), you'll see that the rhythmic and intervallic structure of the melody is exactly the same as the previous measures, but by simply changing the pitches and the accompaniment, it takes on a much different mood. Another great example of this is in the next page on mm. 8-10. The same motif repeats exactly, but the harmony changes and carried the musical thread to a dramatic close.

Throughout the soundtrack, various snippets of this melody (or even the entire thing) re-occur in the same way melodic fragments would be explored, developed, and referenced in something like a sonata or symphony. The characters are the centerpiece of the story - so too, then, is their music!

6

Fl. **final phrase, repeating motif, static contour and settling on tonic: "but, even so...I'm afraid..."**

Sn.

Hrp.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Bass

chordal 7th
OR: dissonant suspension resolving upwards to triadic chord tone

Emaj7 C#m G#m

\flat VI⁷ iv i

(1) - Uematsu creates a lot of dramatic tension by emphasizing the dissonant 7th of the \flat VI chord (Emaj7) in the highest voice of the strings. The major seventh chord built on the \flat VI of the minor scale is a particularly effective and dramatic sounding chord, *especially* when it leads to a minor chord, as it does in this track.

(2) - Instead of using the dominant chord, Uematsu opts for the subdominant (iv) chord to resolve to the tonic. The iv-i cadence is a very solemn, pensive, and melancholy sound (as you can hear). This choice was almost certainly made to fit with the overarching theme of the track; while the characters this theme represents are hopeful and determined, they are not starry-eyed or full of smiles. Theirs is a hope born of determination and clung to in the face of insurmountable odds and incredible suffering - a brighter or more decisive tone to the harmony would betray the emotional weight on the character's shoulders and undermine the story.

A2

11

Fl.

Sn.

Hrp.

Vlins. I

Vlins. II

Bass

Same

The A Section repeats exactly.

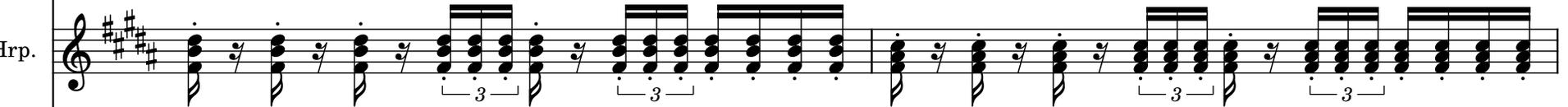
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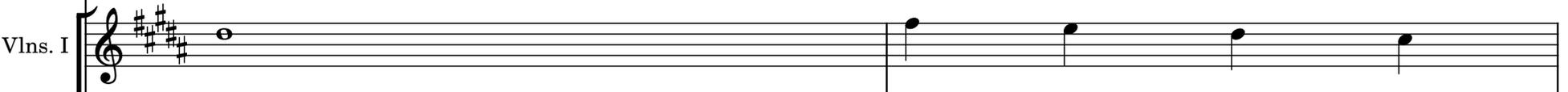
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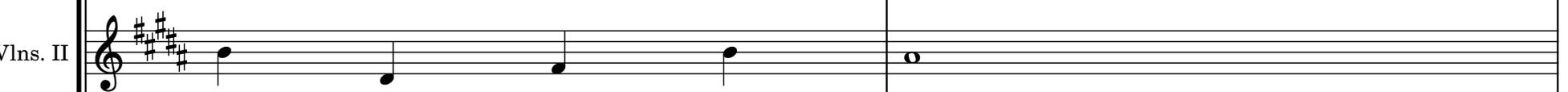
This musical score is for a five-part ensemble: Flute (Fl.), Snare (Sn.), Harp (Hrp.), Violins I (Vlns. I), and Violins II (Vlns. II), and Bass. The music is in a key with four sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#) and a common time signature. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical bar line. The Flute part begins with a melodic line, including a dotted quarter note and eighth notes. The Snare part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with some triplets. The Harp part consists of chords, some of which are triplets. The Violins I part has a whole note in the first measure and a whole rest in the second. The Violins II part has a quarter note in the first measure and a quarter note in the second. The Bass part has a quarter note in the first measure and a quarter note in the second, with some triplets. The number '8' is in the top left corner, and '13' is in the top left corner above the Flute staff. The instrument labels are on the left side of each staff.

Fl. 

Sn. 

Hrp. 

Vlins. I 

Vlins. II 

Bass 

This musical score is for measures 17 and 18. It features five staves: Flute (Fl.), Snare (Sn.), Harp (Hrp.), Violins I (Vlns. I), and Violins II (Vlns. II), and Bass. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The Flute part has a melodic line with rests. The Snare and Bass parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with triplets in measures 17 and 18. The Harp part provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and triplets. The Violin parts are mostly silent in this section.

Fl. Treble clef, key signature of three sharps. Measure 17: quarter note G5, quarter rest, eighth note G5, eighth note A5. Measure 18: quarter note G5, quarter rest, eighth note G5, eighth note A5.

Sn. Percussion clef. Measure 17: eighth note G4, eighth note A4, eighth note B4, eighth note C5, eighth note B4, eighth note A4, eighth note G4. Measure 18: eighth note G4, eighth note A4, eighth note B4, eighth note C5, eighth note B4, eighth note A4, eighth note G4.

Hrp. Treble clef, key signature of three sharps. Measure 17: quarter note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Measure 18: quarter note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4.

Vlns. I Treble clef, key signature of three sharps. Measure 17: quarter note G5, quarter rest. Measure 18: quarter note G5, quarter rest.

Vlns. II Treble clef, key signature of three sharps. Measure 17: quarter note G5, quarter rest. Measure 18: quarter note G5, quarter rest.

Bass Bass clef, key signature of three sharps. Measure 17: eighth note G3, eighth note A3, eighth note B3, eighth note C4, eighth note B3, eighth note A3, eighth note G3. Measure 18: eighth note G3, eighth note A3, eighth note B3, eighth note C4, eighth note B3, eighth note A3, eighth note G3.

19 **B**

Fl.

Hns.

Sn.

Guit.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Bass

B

F#

B Major: I

V

(1) - As the music temporarily dips into the relative major key (B major), French Horns join the Strings in accompanying the melody. The horns lend a grandeur to the timbre and the major chords lend an "uplifting" mood to the harmony. Together, they work in concert to create a positive and contrasting swell in the music.

(2) - While the guitar arpeggios here are referencing the Intro section, there's a technical reason why they've all of a sudden replaced the harp strums. On the SNES, composers were limited to 8 channels (one for each voice), so Uematsu had to replace the three voices used up by the harp in order to fit the horns in. (This is also why there isn't a full string orchestra)

Fl.

Flute staff with treble clef, key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and musical notation including eighth notes and a fermata.

Hns.

Horns staff with treble clef, key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and musical notation including eighth notes and a fermata.

Sn.

Snare drum staff with double bar line and musical notation including eighth notes and triplets.

Guit.

Guitar staff with treble clef, key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and musical notation including eighth notes and triplets.

Vlns. I

Violin I staff with treble clef, key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and musical notation including a whole note.

Vlns. II

Violin II staff with treble clef, key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and musical notation including eighth notes and a whole note.

Bass

Bass staff with bass clef, key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and musical notation including eighth notes and triplets.

B

F#

I

V

Fl.

Hns.

Sn.

Guit.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Bass

G#m

D#m

B Major: vi

G# Minor: i

v

The musical score consists of seven staves. The Flute (Fl.) part starts with a whole note E5, followed by a quarter rest, then eighth notes G5 and A5, and a quarter rest. The Horns (Hns.) part features a dotted quarter note E4, followed by a triplet of eighth notes (F#4, G#4, A4), a dotted quarter note G#4, and a whole note E4. The Timpani (Timp.) part has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a quarter rest, and then a triplet of eighth notes (G#4, A4, B4) in the second measure. The Snare (Sn.) part plays a steady eighth-note pattern: E4, G#4, A4, E4, G#4, A4. The Guitar (Guit.) part plays a similar eighth-note pattern: E4, G#4, A4, E4, G#4, A4. The Violins I (Vlns. I) and Violins II (Vlns. II) parts play whole notes E4 and G#4 respectively. The Bass part plays eighth notes: E3, G#3, A3, E3, G#3, A3.

E C#m G#m
 ♭VI iv i

27 **C**

Hns.

Timp.

Sn.

Cym.

Guit.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Bass

B E C#m

B Major: ① I IV ii

(1) - Like the B section before it, the C section temporarily dips into the relative major key. This temporary modulation is more prolonged, however. The harmony follows a diatonic root movement sequence that you can see in the bass:

- B moves down a fifth to E
- E moves up a sixth to C#m
- C#m moves down a fifth to F#m
- F#m moves up a sixth to D#m

And so on. Harmonic sequences of this kind are excellent and tidy ways to prolong/elongate melodic material. The small melodic phrase in the horns simply ascends stepwise (melodic sequencing) to match the harmony; *a lot is done with a little.*

Chord chart for G# Minor:

F#	D#m	G#m	C#m
V	iii	vi	ii
		<u>G# Minor:</u> i	iv

(1) - Note that the rhythm in this section has simplified quite a bit. This simplification matches with the order and symmetry that the harmonic and melodic sequencing create. The combined result is a C section that is uplifting and content, a great contrast to the pensive, melancholic A and B sections. The contrast isn't so great that it sounds like two entirely different tracks, but it's enough to keep the music interesting.

Hns. 17
 Timp.
 Sn.
 Cym.
 Vlins. I
 Vlins. II
 Bass

B F#
 I V
 \flat III \flat VII

①

(1) - Uematsu makes a deliberate choice to *yet again* avoid a V - i or v - i cadence when resolving back to the tonic. Instead, he opts for the much more solemn \flat VII - i cadence. Not only does this sound very much like "fantasy", but it keeps the music from feeling like it's finished.

Bridge

36

Fl.

Hns.

Timp.

Sn.

Cym.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Bass

G#m

These final two bridge measures mimic the first two Intro measures, thus looping the music effectively.