

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS

- For Educational Use Only -

Terra's Theme

from

Final Fantasy VI

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i

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 **A1** 3

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

Sn. **②**

Hrp.

Vlns. I chordal 7th

Vlns. II

Bass pizz. **③**

G#m i D#m7 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.

5

Fl.

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

Sn.

Hrp.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Bass

G#m

D#m7

i

v⁷

Not all melodic material is ideal for lietmotif/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.

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

B

F#

bIII

bVII

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 carries 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!

9

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

Sn.

Hrp.

Vlms. I

Vlms. II

Bass

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

Emaj7 C#m G#m

bVI⁷ iv i

(1) - Uematsu creates a lot of dramatic tension by emphasizing the dissonant 7th of the bVI chord (Emaj7) in the highest voice of the strings. The major seventh chord built on the bVI 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.

11 **A2**

Fl.

Sn.

Hrp.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Bass

Same

The A Section repeats exactly.

8

13

Fl.

Sn.

Hrp.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Bass

This musical score page contains measures 8 and 13. The key signature is E major (four sharps). The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Flute (Fl.):** Measures 8 and 13. In measure 8, it plays a quarter note G6, an eighth note A6, and a dotted quarter note B6. In measure 13, it plays a quarter note G6, an eighth note A6, and a dotted quarter note B6.
- Snare (Sn.):** Measures 8 and 13. In measure 8, it plays a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a dotted quarter note B4. In measure 13, it plays a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a dotted quarter note B4.
- Harp (Hrp.):** Measures 8 and 13. In measure 8, it plays a dotted quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, and a dotted quarter note B4. In measure 13, it plays a dotted quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, and a dotted quarter note B4.
- Violins I (Vlns. I):** Measures 8 and 13. In measure 8, it plays a whole note G5. In measure 13, it plays a whole note G5.
- Violins II (Vlns. II):** Measures 8 and 13. In measure 8, it plays a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a dotted quarter note B4. In measure 13, it plays a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a dotted quarter note B4.
- Bass:** Measures 8 and 13. In measure 8, it plays a dotted quarter note G3, an eighth note A3, and a dotted quarter note B3. In measure 13, it plays a dotted quarter note G3, an eighth note A3, and a dotted quarter note B3.

15 9

Fl.

Sn.

Hrp.

Vlms. I

Vlms. II

Bass

The musical score is written for a 6-piece ensemble. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into two measures. The first measure (measures 15-16) shows the Flute playing a melodic line, the Snare Drum playing a steady eighth-note pattern, the Harp playing a complex arpeggiated figure with triplets, Violin I playing a whole note, Violin II playing a half note, and the Bass playing a complex eighth-note pattern with triplets. The second measure (measures 17-18) shows the Flute playing a melodic line, the Snare Drum playing a steady eighth-note pattern, the Harp playing a complex arpeggiated figure with triplets, Violin I playing a half note, Violin II playing a whole note, and the Bass playing a complex eighth-note pattern with triplets. The score ends with a double bar line.

Fl.

Sn.

Hrp.

Vlms. I

Vlms. II

Bass

17

18

19 B 11

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)

21

Fl.

Hns.

Sn.

Guit.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Bass

8

3

3

3

3

3

3

3

3

B

F#

I

V

23

Fl.

Hns.

Sn.

Guit.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Bass

G#m

D#m

B Major: vi

G# Minor: i

v

Fl.

Hns.

Timp.

Sn.

Guit.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Bass

E

C#m

G#m

\flat VI

iv

i

Detailed description: This musical score page contains measures 25, 26, and 27. The key signature has four sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#). The Flute (Fl.) part has a half note E in measure 25, a quarter rest in measure 26, and a quarter note G# in measure 27. The Horns (Hns.) part has a dotted half note E in measure 25, a triplet of eighth notes (F#, G#, A) in measure 26, and a dotted half note G# in measure 27. The Timpani (Timp.) part has a whole rest in measure 25, a whole rest in measure 26, and a triplet of eighth notes (F#, G#, A) in measure 27. The Snare (Sn.) part has a steady eighth-note pattern: E, F#, G#, A, B, C#, D#, E. The Guitar (Guit.) part has a steady eighth-note pattern: E, F#, G#, A, B, C#, D#, E. The Violins I (Vlns. I) and Violins II (Vlns. II) parts have a whole note E in measure 25 and a whole note G# in measure 26. The Bass part has a steady eighth-note pattern: E, F#, G#, A, B, C#, D#, E. The chord symbols below the staff are E (labeled \flat VI), C#m (labeled iv), and G#m (labeled i).

27 **C**

Hns.

Timp.

Sn.

Cym.

Guit.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Bass

B E C#m

1
B Major: 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.*

①

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.

Timp.

Sn.

Cym.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Bass

B

F#

I

bIII

V

bVII

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 bVII - i cadence. Not only does this sound very much like "fantasy", but it keeps the music from feeling like it's finished.

Bridge

36

The musical score for the Bridge section, measures 36-37, is written for a full orchestra. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The score is divided into two measures. Measure 36 features a Flute (Fl.) with a whole rest, a Horns (Hns.) section with a half note G4, a Timpani (Timp.) section with a half note G2, a Snare (Sn.) section with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, a Cymbal (Cym.) section with a half note G2, and Violins I (Vlns. I) and Violins II (Vlns. II) with half notes G4 and G3 respectively. The Bass section has a half note G2. Measure 37 features a Flute (Fl.) with a half note G4, a Horns (Hns.) section with a half note G4, a Timpani (Timp.) section with a half note G2, a Snare (Sn.) section with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, a Cymbal (Cym.) section with a half note G2, and Violins I (Vlns. I) and Violins II (Vlns. II) with half notes G4 and G3 respectively. The Bass section has a half note G2. The score ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

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.