

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

Under Martial Law
from Final Fantasy VI

Composed by Nobuo Uematsu
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Intro ♩ = 65

Oboe

English Horn

Harp

Violins

Violins

Drumset

Electric Bass

Harp solidifies tonal center by playing 1st and 5th scale degree.

E natural puts us in G Dorian mode

①

②

The track's title says it all: this music is the background to a part in the game in which you are infiltrating an occupied city that is literally under martial law (by the Empire, the game's main antagonistic force).

(1) - The melodic phrasing here is an interesting choice. Normally, the antecedent (in this case, the first two measures) would have a contour that lands on a lower pitch, and the consequent would land on a higher pitch. Here, they are reversed, and the effect is that of creating a restlessness, an unresolved tension that helps the player/listener feel the anxious uncertainty of the city's populace.

(2) - Throughout the track, the strings drone in parallel fourths that immediately place us in the mysterious, hazy ambience reminiscent of early middle-age *Organum* plainchant. Along with the modal interchange used, this kind of harmony paints a very moody, introspective picture.

5 **A**

Ob.

E. Hn.

Hrp.

Vlns.

Vlns.

D. Set

El. B.

1

2

3

$F\#$ (the flattened second degree) puts us in Phrygian

$C\#$ (the natural sixth degree) puts us in Dorian...

(1) - For both main sections of the track, Uematsu switches between two modes, both of which are *not* the Minor scale. The melody begins with the first tetrachord belonging to both Aeolian and Dorian, but the harmony implies the Dorian sixth degree. In the same measure, it then shifts downwards a half step and - along with the melody, puts us in the Phrygian mode. The overall effect is a somber one that takes the (now familiar) leitmotif and changes its meaning and feeling completely.

(2) - The melody is carried by two wind instruments, presumably an Oboe and an English Horn (as far as I can tell from the SNES samples). In this recreation, they're both Oboe soundfonts because the MS general English Horn soundfont is horrid.

(3) - The rhythm is kept quite simple and repetitive. This may seem like poor composition, but during this particular scene in the game there is a *lot* going on. This rhythm drives the track *just enough*, but also maintains a feeling of inertia, like something *could* happen, but right now everyone - and everything - is just waiting...

9

Ob.

E. Hn.

Hrp.

Vlns.

Vlns.

D. Set

El. B.

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score, starting at measure 9. The score is arranged in six staves. The top staff is for Oboe (Ob.), the second for English Horn (E. Hn.), the third for Harp (Hrp.), the fourth and fifth for Violins (Vlns.), and the sixth for Electric Bass (El. B.). The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The Oboe part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including slurs and ties. The English Horn part is mostly silent, indicated by a horizontal line. The Harp part has a simple accompaniment of quarter notes. The Violin parts have more complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth-note runs. The Electric Bass part provides a steady accompaniment with quarter notes. The score concludes with a double bar line and a key signature change to two flats (Bb).

13 **B**

Ob.

E. Hn.

Hrp.

Vlns.

Vlns.

D. Set

El. B.

The track abruptly transposes down a M3 to the tonal center of C and repeats everything exactly. This is simply to create contrast in the music by establishing a vamp between these two key centers.

Is this phoning it in with a quick copy-paste, or is this kind of minimalism helpful in this context?

I'm not entirely sure. On the one hand, it gets repetitive very quickly and might have been rushed on Uematsu's part. On the other hand, the entire track is designed to be inert, circular, and static - all qualities that fit the gloomy "hold" that the Empire has put on the city.

What do *you* think, reader/listener?

17

The image shows a musical score for tracks 17 through 20. The score is arranged in a system with seven staves. From top to bottom, the staves are: Ob. (Oboe), E. Hn. (English Horn), Hrp. (Harp), Vlns. (Violins), Vlns. (Violas), D. Set (Drum Set), and El. B. (Euphonium/Bass). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 4/4. The score consists of four measures. The Oboe and English Horn parts are melodic, with the English Horn playing a more active line. The Harp part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Violin and Viola parts play a harmonic progression of parallel fourths. The Drum Set part uses a mellophone (indicated by the 'D' and 'Set' label) and plays a simple rhythmic pattern. The Euphonium/Bass part plays a simple rhythmic pattern.

What does Uematsu change in this track, compared to "Troops March On"?

- Most importantly, the melody is carried by woodwinds, not brass. In fact, brass are not present at all in this track. This separates it considerably from the other two, which makes sense from a storytelling perspective as this track accompanies an occupied town on the fringes of the Empire as opposed to the imperial camps or headquarters.
- Woodwinds also sound more "human" than the stern, militant Brass. This suggests that the occupied people are "more human", while the occupying force - the Empire - is "more monstrous".
- The percussion changes to a mellow drumkit. The militaristic marching percussion is dropped again for a more personal sound.
- The tonal center is changed from C to E.
- Harmony is introduced as archaic-sounding parallel 4ths, intimating both the Dorian and Phrygian mode. Along with "Under Martial Law", Uematsu employs the harmony as a two measure progression juxtaposed against an asymmetrical four-measure melody. In this track, take a look at mm. 5-6 and compare them to mm. 7-8: the harmony repeats itself, but the melody - due to its asymmetrical nature - is different. It's a lovely effect, and quite possibly figured out ahead of time.