

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS
- For Educational Use Only -

Those Who Fight Further
(Boss Battle)

from Final Fantasy VII

Composed by Nobuo Uematsu
Transcription/Analysis by Seventh Sam
www.seventhsam.com

A1 ♩ = 160

② b5 of scale = blues note

Electric Guitar

Toms

Drumset

Electric Bass

this note is *not* part of blues minor scale, therefore serves as passing tone at end of 2-bar phrase

①

melodic resolution to tonic via leading tone (G#)

(1) - The repeat/loop point starts at the beginning of third measure due to how the track is structured. The "last" two measures of the track (mm. 69-70) contain nearly the same drum material and an identical bass-line (see above in RED). This essentially means that the "end" of the track sounds like the "beginning". This keeps the music looping seamlessly and the energy/drive constant throughout the battle scene.

(2) - The first 8 measures of the A section (marked here as A1) are best thought of as a vamp (oscillation) every 4 bars between riffing on the A Minor Blues scale and the C Minor Blues scale:

- The melody is derived completely from the respective scales, making use of the b5 of the scale (the blues note, in this context) to create the distinctive sound.
- The bass line resolves via a melodic figure (V-bVII-VII-I) that many listeners will instantly recognize as idiomatic of the blues genre. It has that lovely "suave" sound to it.

The sound is unmistakably "cool", "urban", "smoky", etc. What it is *not* is fantastical, orchestral, or soaring. This is very much Uematsu's intent: grounding the music in a vaguely blue-sy aesthetic fits right in with the grungy sci-fi setting of Final Fantasy VII.

5 b5 of scale = blues note 3

El. Guit.

Org.

Toms

D. Set

El. B.

melodic resolution to tonic via leading tone (B)

The musical score is written for five instruments: El. Guit., Org., Toms, D. Set, and El. B. The El. Guit. staff is in bass clef and contains a melodic line with a blue note marked 'b5 of scale = blues note'. The Org. staff is in treble clef and has a glissando line at the end. The Toms staff is in bass clef and contains a melodic line. The D. Set staff is in bass clef and contains a series of 'x' marks representing cymbal hits. The El. B. staff is in bass clef and contains a melodic line with a red note marked 'melodic resolution to tonic via leading tone (B)'.

9 **A2**

El. Guit.

Org.

D. Set

El. B.

two groups of three

three groups of two

three groups of two

two groups of three

three groups of two

two groups of three

② Am

Bm7

Am

D

A Dorian: i

ii⁷

i


IV


(1) - The drums spice things up in this section with a hemiola (2 against 3 polyrhythm). To my ears, this has the effect of increasing tension (and, thus, forward drive). Why? Our minds tend to crave symmetry and order; hearing the clashing rhythms makes the listener subconsciously desire more rhythmic stability. When it finally arrives (in mm. 29, the start of the B section), it makes the resolution all the more satisfying and distinct.

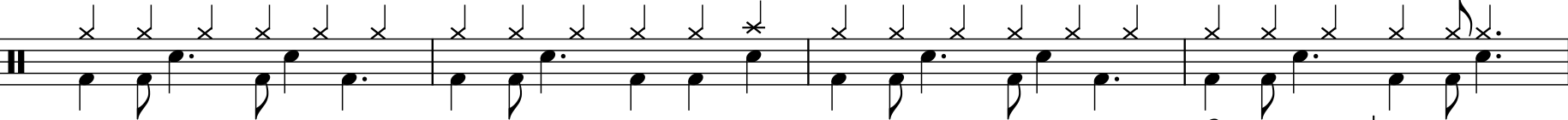
(2) - The second part of the A section (A2) adds characteristic Dorian harmonies to the vamp via the introduction of the rock organ. The choice of Dorian here seems to reinforce Uematsu's intent on making the music sound "cool" and thus plant it in the urban, sci-fi aesthetic.


So is the track in A minor, A blues minor, A Dorian, or what? The answer is: all of the above. In this track (and most all of his output, to be frank), Uematsu uses modal interchange quite liberally, mixing and matching whatever progressions and chords fit the music's function and mood. As such, I've done my best to accompany the roman numeral analysis with the modes (and their functional diatonic progressions) that Uematsu was drawing upon on a section-by-section basis.

13 5

El. Guit. 

Org. 

D. Set 

El. B. 

Cm F Cm ① F7

C Dorian: i IV i $\flat VI^7$

(1) - This is one of Uematsu's favorite cadences, the $\flat VI^7 - i$. In classical terms, this is akin to using a G^{+6} (German Augmented Sixth) chord in a *dominant* function as opposed to the usual *pre-dominant substitute* function. The result is sinister-sounding chromatic resolution that leaves the listener feeling somewhat *unresolved*. It makes perfect sense that Uematsu would use this here, then, as this leads straight into the thundering Bridge section that follows. Were he to lead into it with a $V7-i$, it might weaken the forward momentum of the music. When it comes to boss battle music, forward momentum is worth its weight in gold.

17 **Bridge 1**

El. Guit.

Org.

Arp.

Toms

D. Set

El. B.

Am

E7

C

G

F

C

A Minor:

i

V⁷

♭III

♭VII

♭VI

♭III

(1) - Thus far, all the timbral elements of the track have been analog (or electric analog), elements a listener would associate with a rock band playing a rock song. Then, out of nowhere, comes a soaring square wave arpeggio that injects a distinctly digital flavor into the music. Once again, Uematsu is drawing upon disparate genres/idioms (in this case, electronica) to reinforce the specific mood the game he's scoring calls for. We'll hear this with a vengeance in the C Section (starting on mm. 45) when a sawtooth lead takes center stage.

(2) - It's interesting to note that Uematsu - a self-taught aficionado of prog rock who found his niche in video game music - takes the time here to follow basic 4-part harmony voice leading "rules" (the guitar and organ in mm. 19-21 form a four part "chorus", albeit non-traditionally spaced due to the instrumentation). No parallel fifths/octaves, no hidden fifths/octaves, an abundance of contrary motion, proper/skillful resolution of suspensions, etc.

El. Guit.

Org.

Arp.

Toms

D. Set

El. B.

chordal 7th,
result of suspension

chordal b9,
result of suspension

Dm7

E7 \flat 9

Am

iv⁷

V^{7 \flat 9}

i

El. Guit.

Org.

Arp.

Toms

D. Set

El. B.

Am E7 C G F C

i V⁷ ♭III ♭VII ♭VI ♭III

El. Guit.

Org.

Arp.

Toms

D. Set

El. B.

8

Dm7

E7 \flat 9

Am

iv⁷V^{7 \flat 9}

i

El. Guit.

Org.

D. Set

El. B.

F# is from A Dorian

rhythmic diminution of blue-sy bass motif

Am ① D Am Go Am D Am E7 Am

A Minor: i IV i vii° i IV i V⁷ i

IV chord (D major) is borrowed from parallel Dorian

(1) - The bass hammers away at a rhythmic diminution (halving of note duration) of the blue-sy bass motif heard in the beginning of the track. In this way, Uematsu simultaneously introduces new material (the rapid-fire, classical style scalar melody in the rock organ) while retaining continuity in overall mood/feel.

33

El. Guit.

Org. ①

D. Set

El. B.

(1) - The melody is doubled in thirds to add contrast and interest to the second 4-bars of the 8-bar B section. While this changes the harmony on a note-by-note basis, it doesn't change the underlying fundamentals of the harmonic motion (from tonic to pre-dominant to dominant and back again) Given that the bass and guitar remain statically fixed on hovering insistently around the tonic, this section is more about the *horizontal* motion rather than the *vertical* motion.

Bridge 2

37

El. Guit.

Org.

Arp.

Toms

D. Set

El. B.

①

G

Gsus2/sus4 G

C

G

Gsus2/sus4 G7

C

C Major:

V

I

V

V⁷

I

(1) - An abrupt shift to the relative major (C Major) forms the basis for the second bridge section. These four measures offer a brief but bright change in tone (triumphant and upbeat). Why? If this is a boss battle, shouldn't this sound dire and dramatic? Yes, but if the *entirety* of the music is on one note (so to speak), the effect of the music is greatly diminished. By offering a contrasting tone in these measures, Uematsu is making the upcoming four measures and the subsequent C section that much more *distinguished*.

El. Guit.

Org.

Arp.

Toms

D. Set

El. B.

sus2 of A

sus4 of A

A A(sus2/sus4) A7 Dm A A(sus2/sus4) A7 Bb ①

D Minor: V V⁷ i V V⁷ bVI

(1) - This is an interesting harmonic choice on Uematsu's part:

- In most cases, the cadence in mm. 43-44 would be bVI - V7, which would then resolve to the tonic in the following section.

This would, of course, create a very decisive and satisfying resolution.

- Uematsu essentially reverses that here, choosing instead to use V7 - bVI - i. The effect is that of a deceptive cadence that then suddenly "resolves" to the tonic anyhow. The mood this creates, to my ears, is a swelling of unresolved drama and serves to very effectively propel the music forward. It's very fitting that this cadence was used *here*, because the *longest* section of the track is what follows and it's imperative that the listener go into it *wanting more*.

45

C1

②

El. Guit.

Org.

③

Lead

D. Set

①

El. B.

Dm C Dm Gm C Dm C Dm

D Minor: i \flat VII i iv \flat VII i

(1) - Uematsu - sly dog that he is - sneaks in the famous "battle motif" found in every battle theme of his throughout the series thus far. More than just fanservice, this is his way of establishing a "cross-game leitmotif" (similar to his victory fanfare, overture, or the chocobo theme). It serves as a musical way to help tie the entire *series* of games into a cohesive whole and make the experience of these stories that much more meaningful to the players, albeit in a very "meta" way. It's a nice touch, I think, and one that shows Uematsu thinks of his audience as more than just customers.

(2) - The guitar, bass, and drums combine to make the unmistakeable rhythmic framework of none other than...an irish jig?!?!

(3) - And then, to top it off, a *saw lead* straight out of Blade Runner or an old-style techno track swoops in to take the lead... what *genre* is this?...

El. Guit. 

Org. 

Lead 

D. Set 

El. B. 

There's that blue-sy bass motif again....

①

Am Dm Am Dm Am G Am G Am

A Minor:

i iv i iv i \flat VII i \flat VII i

(1) - Throughout the C section, Uematsu continues the 4-bar vamp harmonic model. This time, it's a vamp between D minor and A minor, with some modal interchange for good measure (pun not intended).

53 **C2**

El. Guit.

Org.

Lead

Str.

D. Set

El. B.

Dm Em Borrowed from Dm Gmadd4 Dm7 Borrowed from G Dm
D Minor: i ii i iv i IV i
parallel Dorian parallel Dorian

(1) - And, to top it all off, an orchestral string section enters to deepen the harmony and escalate the tension. So, let's review...of all the musical genres, styles, and idioms Uematsu has drawn upon to specifically craft this track in service of the game, we have:

- a) Blues riffs/licks in guitar and bass
- b) A rock organ that follows basic 4-part harmony voice leading and whips out functional scalar melodies
- c) Synth arpeggios and leads straight out of old-school electronica
- d) A 12/8 rhythm that blatantly dives into irish-jig territory
- e) An orchestral-sounding string section

That's a hell of a line-up! Bound only by the artistic needs of the story and experience at hand, Uematsu weaves a diverse and eclectic range of inspirations into a singularly unique and unforgettable track. It's iconic, it's well composed, it serves the game...and ultimately, it just sounds *fun*.

El. Guit.

Org.

Lead

Str.

D. Set

El. B.

Am

Bø

Am

Dmadd4

Am7

Borrowed
from D
parallel
Dorian IV

Am

A Minor:

i

ii°

i

iv

i⁷

i

61 **C3**

El. Guit.

Org.

Lead

Str.

D. Set

El. B.

Same

(1) - The section repeats with the strings transposed up an octave. Higher pitch = higher tension. This is setting us up for the final cadence that takes us to the loop.

El. Guit.

Org.

Lead

Str.

Toms

D. Set

El. B.

voice leading facilitated by bVII-V

gliss.

gliss.

C

D ①

G

E

bIII

V/bVII

bVII

V

A Minor:**(1) - Quick harmonic analysis:**

1. C to D creates a "lift" by virtue of the Lydian sounding progression of major triads by root movement of a major second.
2. This "lift" lands on a secondary dominant (D), which will resolve to G.
3. G serves as the bVII pre-dominant. Why this chord? It facilitates chromatic voice leading from G to G# (see above).
Not only is G# the leading tone, but this chromatic movement (G -> G# -> A) is reminiscent of the chromatic bass motif (the blue-sy one) that recurs throughout the track.
4. The chord of E major, then, serves as the dominant which, of course, resolves to the tonic.

El. Guit.

Org.

Lead

Str.

D. Set

El. B.

Musical score for measures 69 and 70. The score is written for six staves: El. Guit., Org., Lead, Str., D. Set, and El. B. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The El. Guit. and Org. parts play a sustained chord in measure 69, which changes in measure 70. The Lead part plays a melodic line in measure 69 and a more complex line in measure 70. The Str. part plays a sustained chord in measure 69, which changes in measure 70. The D. Set part plays a series of eighth notes in measure 69 and a series of eighth notes in measure 70. The El. B. part plays a bass line in measure 69 and a bass line in measure 70.

same bass line as mm. 2

Am

i