

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS
- For Educational Use Only -

Storm Eagle Stage

from Mega Man X

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Intro ♩ = 85

High Strings

Strings

Lead Guitar

Rhythm Guitar

Drumset

Electric Bass

F#-B implies tonic chord

E-A implies subtonic chord

chromatic rise to tonic idiomatic of blues/rock

Mega Man X's OST is - above all else - a love letter to the power metal genre (and all its rock/blues influences). The opening two measures of this stage are no exception: open fourths (creating a powerchord-ish sound) punctuate a syncopated rhythm guitar riff that plants the listener's mind in B Minor without any of the classical trappings.

One might ask: *why* is Mega Man X's music (and the rest of the series, for that matter) essentially a bunch of power metal? The most honest answer I can think of is: **because**. Functionally, the non-stop (often syncopated) rhythmic grooves, electrifying timbre of guitars and synths, the hyperactive, pulse-pounding melodies, and the oh-so-satisfying sound of powerchords all lend themselves extremely well to the game's visual style as well as the gameplay itself (non-stop platforming action). But I highly doubt a panel of deliberative musicologists sat in a meeting at Capcom one day and weighed the pros and cons of this genre vs. that genre; I think they just like metal and wanted metal, so metal it was!

I ain't complaining. I *love* this stuff!

The musical score consists of six staves: H. Strs., Strs., L. Guitar, R. Gtr., D. Set, and El. B. The key signature is B minor (two sharps). The score is divided into two measures by a double bar line. The first measure contains a high-pitched violin ostinato (1) and a melodic line with a chromatic rise to the leading tone (2). The second measure continues the melodic line and features a chromatic rise to the leading tone (2) in the R. Gtr. staff. The D. Set staff has a double bar line with a double asterisk (**) above it. The El. B. staff has a double bar line with a double asterisk (**) below it. The chord progression is as follows:

Bm	F#	Gmaj7	A	F#7/A#
i	V	bVI7	bVII	V7

This particular stage (Storm Eagle's) is set in a futuristic flying airship/station miles above an enormous airport. How, then, does the music make the player feel like they're "high in the sky?"

1) The extremely high pitched violin ostinato. Not only does the extremely high pitch automatically suggest "being high up", but the tremolo makes me think of things like whirring helicopter blades, aircraft machinery beeping and blooping, and other such things. This is, of course, very subjective.

2) Speaking of subjective, these quick 32nd note melodic passing tones give the melody an angular, "hold-RUSH-hold-RUSH" effect that makes me think of a flying plane (or even animal) quickly swooping and swerving in its flight path.

5 8

H. Strs.

Strs.

L. Guitar

R. Gtr.

D. Set

El. B.

Same

Same

1) Since this ostinato doesn't change its notes along with the harmonic motion of the other parts, I think of it more like a "pedal ostinato" that continually reiterates the key center (B natural minor/Aeolian, via the notes B (tonic), A (subtonic), and F# (dominant)). It's important to note that this doesn't seem to screw up the chord progressions in the melody proper precisely because the pitch of this ostinato is so high (and it sits back in the mix).

7 **B**

H. Strs.

Strs. *melodic minor can be used descending, too!*

L. Guitar

R. Gtr.

D. Set

El. B.

G **1** F# Bm **2** C#m D Bm/F# G F#

bVI V i ii bIII i₄ bVI V

1) A common and effective technique for creating a contrasting section in a minor-key track is to begin the contrasting section with the bVI chord. Here's a textbook example: the bVI leads beautifully into the V chord via half step. In other tracks, it may resolve to the relative major (via bVII -> bIII or by way of plagal bVI -> bIII) or do something different altogether. In any case, it's a handy tool to have in the harmonic toolbox!

2) These chords are implied by the rising third motion in the melody. The important thing about this progression is in the *bass*: it resolves to a second-inversion tonic which, by definition, contains the V of the scale in the bass. This rises chromatically to the bVI of the scale in the next measure: smooth voice leading.

Bridge

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The musical score for the Bridge section consists of six staves. The top staff, labeled 'H. Strs.', features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps. The second staff, 'Strs.', and the third staff, 'L. Guitar', both use a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps, with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. The fourth staff, 'R. Gtr.', uses a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps, with a 3/8 time signature and a pattern of eighth notes. The fifth staff, 'D. Set', uses a percussion clef and a key signature of two sharps, with a pattern of eighth notes and a double bar line with a repeat sign. The bottom staff, 'El. B.', uses a bass clef and a key signature of two sharps, with a pattern of eighth notes and a double bar line with a repeat sign. A 'Bm' chord symbol is placed below the bottom staff. A double bar line with a repeat sign is located at the end of the fifth staff.

A descending, ornamented B minor (tonic chord) arpeggio leads the listener smoothly back into a four-measure bridge section. This section echoes the intro and parts of the A section with such similarity that the track loops completely seamlessly. Short and sweet.

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H. Strs.

Strs.

L. Guitar

R. Gtr.

D. Set

El. B.

This musical score is for a string ensemble and guitar. It consists of six staves, all in the key of D major (two sharps) and 8/8 time. The first staff, labeled 'H. Strs.', features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in pairs, with a repeat sign at the end. The second staff, 'Strs.', and the third staff, 'L. Guitar', are both silent, indicated by a horizontal bar across the staff. The fourth staff, 'R. Gtr.', contains a melodic line with eighth notes and some chords, including a double bar line with a repeat sign. The fifth staff, 'D. Set', shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a 'x' symbol above the first measure, indicating a muted sound. The sixth staff, 'El. B.', provides a bass line with eighth notes and some chords, also ending with a repeat sign.