

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS
- For Educational Use Only -

The
Brink of Death
from Chrono Cross

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Intro ♩ = 91

Trumpets

French Horns

Hat

Triangle

Cymbal

Bells

Congas

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Piano

Violins I

Violins II

Violas

Violoncellos

Electric Bass

Persistent hi-hat pattern creates a 4/4 pulse and emphasizes backbeat. This allows syncopation in everything else to juxtapose and heightens rhythm's effectiveness.

The bell (or whatever it is) lands on and **accentuates** the second note of the groove, making syncopation more driving/effective.

Snare and Conga follow groove's foundation and "fill in the blanks" with flourishes and fills.

Bass drum and E.bass form the groove's foundation.

Not sure if this is right. Hard to hear snare apart from BD in original track

Last two beats of bass line establish E minor tonality (notice the bVI degree and leading tone)

STRUCTURE:

INTRO - Establishes groove and nearly identical to last section, facilitating looping.
 A - Primary section. Repeats itself.
 B - Bridge section.
 C - Primary section. Repeats itself, with through-composed melody.
 D - Bridge section.
 OUTRO - Mimics intro with some added flair, loops right back to A as if starting the track over again.

E_{sus}⁴

Not really a sus chord:
 actually a quartal/quintal sound.
 Label is sus4 for convenience.

All we need is notes E and B for the fat, quartal "stomp" sound.
Melody also lines up with groove, making it even **more** effective. Rhythm is dense, but locks together so well.

A1

3

Tpts.

F Hns.

Hat

Trgl.

Cym.

Bells

Con.

Sn. D

BD

Pno.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

El. B.

p *f*

Interesting tritone usage:
not part of a chord, but rather
a chromatic descent. Doesn't
resolve traditionally, but still
resolves.

p *f*

f *p* *f*

f *p* *f*

bV degree dips music into blues-y
territory. Less dangerous, more fun sounding.

Some vague patterns in this run, but nothing
conclusive other than "crazy chromaticism makes
it sound chaotic". Not everything is tightly engineered...

ON THE TONALITY: The A section is in E...something. Minor/Aeolian/Phrygian/Dorian/Blues/Pentatonic...
It switches back and forth so liberally (and uses quartal/quintal harmony so frequently) that it's more apt to say it's using
a plethora of minor modes centered around E. Harmony is non-functional and quartal/quintal, so RNA is N/A.

5

Tpts.

F Hns.

Hat

Trgl.

Cym.

Bells

Con.

Sn. D

BD

Pno.

Vlms. I

Vlms. II

El. B.

p *f*

p *f*

f *p* *f*

f *p* *f*

Blues note!

NOTE TO SELF: Grand piano's low range makes EXCELLENT doubling with bass and low drums. The timbre is so satisfyingly dark and sinister, yet exciting.

E Minor Pentatonic Scale

A2

This track is a great example of "Spotlighting", in which primary focus of the music switches between parts of the ensemble:
Follow the parts highlighted in red to visualize the "spotlight".

7

Tpts.

F Hns.

Hat

Trgl.

Cym.

Bells

Con.

Sn. D

BD

Pno.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

El. B.

p *f*

p *f*

f *p* *f*

f *p* *f*

One of my few gripes with this track. This polyrhythmic meandering in the conga doesn't add to the track in a positive way. It sounds more like a pissed-off woodpecker. Novelty for novelty's sake?

9

Tpts.

F Hns.

Hat

Trgl.

Cym.

Bells

Con.

Sn. D

BD

Pno.

Vlms. I

Vlms. II

El. B.

f

p

f

p

f

f

p

f

f

p

f

B

Dominant and Tonic reinforced throughout the section.

11

Tpts.

Melody is quartal. Why?:

- Sounds menacing
- Avoids creating too strong of a sense of one tonality
- P4 blends two voices together, so it's a "thickener" rather than contrapuntal.

F Hns.

II degree (Aeolian) bVI degree (Aeolian)

Hat

Trgl.

Cym.

Bells

Con.

Sn. D

BD

V degree (All of them) bII degree (Phrygian)

Vlns. I

These repeated ostinatos with slight modifications are a feature of Chrono Cross' soundtrack. Mitsuda studied various folk traditions in preparation, and I've a hunch this is in the style of one of them...

Vlns. II

To my ear, it tends to make the music sound more like a dance. An effective aesthetic choice that gives Chrono Cross a unique, non-traditional flavor.

El. B.

D Minor Pentatonic

TONALITY: Shifted a whole step down to D. Still a lot of mode mixture, but the tone is unmistakably darker. The battle went from "this is cool!" to "oh, shit, it's getting difficult now..."

13

Tpts.

F Hns.

Hat

Trgl.

Cym.

Bells

Con.

Sn. D

BD

Vlms. I

Vlms. II

El. B.

This musical score page contains measures 13 and 14 for a percussion and string ensemble. The percussion section includes Tpts. (Trumpets), F Hns. (Flute/Horns), Hat, Trgl. (Triangle), Cym. (Cymbal), Bells, Con. (Conga), Sn. D. (Snare Drum), and BD (Bass Drum). The string section includes Vlms. I (Violins I), Vlms. II (Violins II), and El. B. (Electric Bass). The score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). Measures 13 and 14 are marked with a double bar line and repeat signs at the end. The percussion parts feature various rhythmic patterns, including eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and rests, with some notes marked with accents (>). The string parts feature eighth and sixteenth note patterns, with some notes marked with flats (b).

15 **C1** Having trouble hearing the upper voice (if there is one)

Tpts.

F Hns.

Hat

Trgl.

Cym.

Bells

Con.

The Conga decides to go rogue and completely "improv" during this section. Not sure if that's a good artistic choice or not...

Sn. D

BD

There's that woodpecker!

My other gripe:
this voice overlapping in Vlms sounds too "smeary"
and messes with the music's clarity.

Vlms. I

Vlms. II

Vlas.

Vcs.

El. B.

Gm⁷

TONALITY: The C section uses a vamp between Gm⁷ and Fm⁷ (both mellow sounding harmonies) to contrast dark B section with brightness. This creates an uplift, "ray of hope" effect in the musical storytelling. Notice the lack of leading tones and prevalence of subtonics - much more adventurous, hopeful sounding.

17

Tpts.

F Hns.

Hat

Trgl.

Cym.

Bells

Con.

Sn. D

BD

Vlms. I

Vlms. II

Vlas.

Vcs.

El. B.

Fm⁷

D natural signals that it's F Dorian, not Aeolian. This leads to a brighter sound that vamps nicely with G Minor/Aeolian.

No Db in this ostinato, reinforcing Dorian tonality.

Motif in 2nd violins echoed in bass line to punctuate sections and tie music together.

C2

19

Score for Percussion and Strings, measures 19-21.

Percussion:

- Tpts.:** Treble clef, key of Bb. Measures 19-21: Repeating eighth-note chords (Fb, Ab, Bb) with a downward eighth-note (Ab).
- F Hns.:** Treble clef, key of Bb. Measures 19-21: Sustained chord (Fb, Ab, Bb) in measure 19, followed by a descending eighth-note arpeggio (Ab, Bb, Cb, Db) in measures 20-21.
- Hat:** Double bar line. Measures 19-21: Continuous eighth-note pattern with accents.
- Trgl.:** Double bar line. Measures 19-21: Eighth-note chords (Fb, Ab, Bb) with a downward eighth-note (Ab).
- Cym.:** Double bar line. Measures 19-21: Sustained chord (Fb, Ab, Bb) in measure 19, followed by a rest in measures 20-21.
- Bells:** Double bar line. Measures 19-21: Eighth-note chords (Fb, Ab, Bb) with a downward eighth-note (Ab).
- Con.:** Double bar line. Measures 19-21: Repeating eighth-note chords (Fb, Ab, Bb) with a downward eighth-note (Ab).
- Sn. D:** Double bar line. Measures 19-21: Repeating eighth-note chords (Fb, Ab, Bb) with a downward eighth-note (Ab).
- BD:** Double bar line. Measures 19-21: Sustained chord (Fb, Ab, Bb) in measure 19, followed by a rest in measures 20-21.

Strings:

- Vlins. I:** Treble clef, key of Bb. Measures 19-21: Repeating eighth-note chords (Fb, Ab, Bb) with a downward eighth-note (Ab).
- Vlins. II:** Treble clef, key of Bb. Measures 19-21: Sustained chord (Fb, Ab, Bb) in measure 19, followed by a descending eighth-note arpeggio (Ab, Bb, Cb, Db) in measures 20-21.
- Vlas.:** Treble clef, key of Bb. Measures 19-21: Sustained chord (Fb, Ab, Bb) in measure 19, followed by a rest in measures 20-21.
- Vcs.:** Bass clef, key of Bb. Measures 19-21: Sustained chord (Fb, Ab, Bb) in measure 19, followed by a rest in measures 20-21.
- El. B.:** Bass clef, key of Bb. Measures 19-21: Repeating eighth-note chords (Fb, Ab, Bb) with a downward eighth-note (Ab).

One of Mitsuda's favorite arpeggios - downwards maj7 chord in first inversion.

Gm7

21

Tpts.

F Hns.

Hat

Trgl.

Cym.

Bells

Con.

Sn. D

BD

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Vlas.

Vcs.

El. B.

Fm7

23 **D**

Tpts.

F Hns.

Hat

Trgl.

Cym.

Bells

BD

Vlins. I

Vlins. II

Vlas.

Vcs.

El. B.

D⁵

G[#]m^{add2}

Not a chord per se, rather a tonal center with a sharp m6 dissonance on top. Sounds very scary and threatening. The battle isn't nearly over!

MODULATION:

Start with D, up a tritone to G[#]m(add2), down a whole step to F[#]m(add2), then chromatic planing until the target (E^m) is hit. Why m(add2)? It sound extremely dissonant and tense. Coupled with near chromatic root movement, it makes this section incredibly dark.

Also note: three of four notes in m(add2) chords sound out a quartal/quintal chord. The third of chord is voiced as an embellishment (see above), which allows the "quartal" notes to stand in sharp relief.

Tpts. 

Hat 

Trgl. 

Bells 

BD 

Vlms. I 

Vlms. II 

Vlas. 

Vcs. 

El. B. 

F#m^{add2}/C# Fm^{add2}

Outro

I didn't transcribe the male war-chant shouts in the original, as those are unpitched and don't really tell me anything about the rhythm that isn't inherent in the other elements of the music.

27

Musical score for the 'Outro' section, measures 27-28. The score is written for a full orchestra and includes the following parts:

- Tpts.** (Trumpets): Measure 27 has a whole note G4, tied to a whole note G4 in measure 28.
- Hat**: Measure 27 has a continuous eighth-note pattern (x x x x x x x x) with accents. Measure 28 has a continuous eighth-note pattern (x x x x x x x x) with accents.
- Trgl.** (Triangle): Measure 27 has a dotted quarter note G4, eighth note G4, dotted quarter note G4, eighth note G4. Measure 28 has a dotted half note G4.
- Cym.** (Cymbal): Measure 27 has a whole note G4, tied to a whole note G4 in measure 28.
- Bells**: Measure 27 has a dotted quarter note G4, eighth note G4, dotted quarter note G4, eighth note G4. Measure 28 has a dotted half note G4.
- Con.** (Conga): Measure 27 has a continuous eighth-note pattern (x x x x x x x x) with accents. Measure 28 has a continuous eighth-note pattern (x x x x x x x x) with accents.
- Sn. D** (Snare Drum): Measure 27 has a continuous eighth-note pattern (x x x x x x x x) with accents. Measure 28 has a continuous eighth-note pattern (x x x x x x x x) with accents.
- BD** (Bass Drum): Measure 27 has a dotted quarter note G4, eighth note G4, dotted quarter note G4, eighth note G4. Measure 28 has a dotted half note G4.
- Vlins. I** (Violins I): Measure 27 has a whole note G4, tied to a whole note G4 in measure 28.
- Vlins. II** (Violins II): Measure 27 has a whole note G4, tied to a whole note G4 in measure 28.
- Vlas.** (Violas): Measure 27 has a whole note G4, tied to a whole note G4 in measure 28.
- Vcs.** (Cellos): Measure 27 has a whole note G4, tied to a whole note G4 in measure 28.
- El. B.** (Electric Bass): Measure 27 has a continuous eighth-note pattern (x x x x x x x x) with accents. Measure 28 has a continuous eighth-note pattern (x x x x x x x x) with accents.

Em

And...back to the home key, just in time for the loop.