VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS
- For Educational Use Only -

Prologue
from Final Fantasy IV

Composed by Nobuo Uematsu
Transcription/Analysis by Seventh Sam
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Intro ♩ = 63

Trumpets

16th triplets characteristic of ceremonial,
fanfare-style music

Violins I

sus4 (Bb) resolves to A next measure

Violins II

Violas

chordal 7th

Cellos

Interesting chord choice. Could
bethought of as:
bII of the dominant key (F), OR
bVI derived from Mixolydian b6
mode

Now we actually resolve the sus4

And the dominant 7th leads
to our home key. Easy.

Fsus4 here doesn't actually resolve.
Rather, it creates a powerful, quartal
sound.

Basses

| F$_{sus}$⁴ | G♭$_{maj}$⁷ | F⁷$_{sus}$⁴ | F⁷ |

Key of Bb: V   ♭VI   V⁷

Key of F: ♭II   I

NOTE: Not to be confused with "Prelude", which is the harp arpeggio one.
ALSO NOTE: I hid the percussion staves because the drum and cymbal are only used for rhythmic punctuation in this track. The meat of the study is in the harmony.

This melody might as well be the "theme song" for the entire Final Fantasy series. It's been with the franchise throughout its life span and beautifully captures the essence of what Final Fantasy is about.

CRPGs at the time were much more concerned with emulating tabletop games and providing branching, proto-sandboxes. Their music followed suit: impersonal, ambient, generalized. Not so with Uematsu's music for Final Fantasy. His music - and this track in particular - set the tone for what JRPGs would become: emotionally gripping, character-focused epics that felt like you were center-stage in a long-running novel, movie, or TV series.

So why this iteration? Because, starting with FF4, Uematsu was finally able to break out of the 8-bit shackles that had previously constrained his output and start adding heft (16-bit as it was) to his music. Case in point: a four-part harmonization of the melody realized by a "string" orchestra. I can only imagine Uematsu's glee as he heard something other than a square or triangle wave sound out his compositions.

For my part, this track is a fantastic case study in four-part harmony utilized in a practical fashion well outside of the common-practice time period.

A

5

Vlns. I

Accented NH Tone (makes Dm7)   sus4 resolution   Accented N.H Tone (makes Cmadd4)

Vlns. II

suspension (makes add2)

resolves to F

Vlas.

Cellos + Basses are doubled at 8ve, effectively acting as one of four voices

double neighbors from C7, held over

Vcs.

Use of inversions allows for ultra-smooth bass line.

deceptive cadence (V7-ii)   passing 6/4

Cbs.

	Bb	F/A	Eb/G	F	Eb	C7/E	Fsus4	F	Cm/Eb	G7/D	Cm	G7	Cm	Bo/C	C7	Dm	F
Key of Bb:	I	V	IV	V	IV	V7/V	V	**Key of Bb:** ii						V7/V	iii	V
Key of C:								i	V7	i	V7	i	viio	i		
Key of F:					V7	I	**Key of F:**								vi	I

Observations about chords:
- First two measures are entirely major chords. Second are almost all minor. Why?
A deceptive cadence in the middle temporarily dips into C minor, which itself just vacillates between tonic and dominant a bunch. Why?
1) Supports the melody (more on second page), and 2) Provides symmetrical contrast.
What's the importance of the contrast?
- Symmetry of it enhances music's overall macro-rhythm and formal structure. Makes the track feel more important.
- Too bright and hopeful sounding if everything is just parked in Bb major. Need a *slight* foray into minor tonality to give the music drama and tension.
- Only time there is a (big) leap in the bass is at the middle of the phrase.
- Melody was composed *first*, meaning there is some awkwardness in inner voice leading. Even so, bass line is taken care of and helps glue any disparity together.

Observations about melody:
- Melody works so well because of internal contrast (see above). Tension/release isn't just for harmony.
- Melody is sequenced up a diatonic step in second two measures. Cheating? Nope - if Mozart can do it, so can Uematsu.
- Aforementioned sequencing is primary reason C minor is the temporary tonal center of second two measures.
- Reusal of motifs helps create memorability and coherence. Hearing the familiar rhythm within the tapestry of sound helps the listener enjoy the music. Perhaps there could've been more? Possibly, but this *was* added to the melody after the fact...

B

13

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Vlas.

Vcs.

Cbs.

sus that resolves

reharm over repeated figure

more melodic sequencing, this time
up a half step. why re-invent the wheel
when you have 50+ tracks to make?

Bb minor triad,
hence Bb melodic
minor running up
to it

double neighbor susp.
resolving to third
sort of a picardy third
thing

motif from earlier

Ab major scale

Bb melodic minor

still Bb scale, so no
key change

F minor scale

Bb arpeggio

chordal 7th

this chord is largely incidental,
owed to scalar motion in violas

| Eb | | Bb | Mixolydian | Ab | Gsus⁴ | G⁷ | Cm⁷ | Lydian vii->I | Db | | Cm | | A⌀ | Gbmaj⁷ | Fm | | Fsus⁴ | F |

Key of Bb: IV   I   ♭VII   **Key of Bb:**   VI⁷   v   V

Key of C: ♭VI   V⁷   i   ♭II   i   **Key of F:**   ♭II⁷   i   I

B SECTION:
Big ol' dramatic climax to the whole thing.
- Upper voice (Violins I) reaches its highest pitch during this section. Higher pitch = higher tension (context dependent)
- The bass breaks off towards skipping motion more frequently, agitating the section.
- Macro-rhythmic contrast between major and "minor" sound is measure-to-measure, which hurries the music along.
- A game of hot-potato:
mm. 13 - Violins chill on the cool high notes, bass goes nuts with scales and arpeggios
mm. 14 - Violins I takes the potato and runs around with it
mm. 15 - Violins decide to chill again. Cello + Bass join in, while lonely Viola takes scale duty.
mm. 16 - Everyone decides they like potatos and go nuts for the resolution to the tonic.

- In mm. 16, the initial Gb major 7th is ONLY Gb major 7th because of the Gb in the bass. The upper voices form a root
position triad of Bb minor (the last three notes of Gb major 7th). Root position, close-spacing...you'd be forgiven if you
heard Bb minor instead of the full chord. This kind of spacing with 7ths or extended chords is a very powerful technique,
allowing lots and lots of flexibility when it comes to mood-setting and harmonic coloration. (This is also why Bb Melodic
Minor is running up to Bb in the Violas - the scale is melodically resolving to the target "triad").