

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS

- For Educational Use Only -

Hydra's Swamp

from Chrono Cross

Composed by Yasunori Mitsuda
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Maqam Hijaz (loosely equivalent to a scale in western music) is the basis for this ostinato.

Formed from two Jins (loosely equivalent to tetrachords).

First is Jin Hijaz - D, Eb, F#, G

Second is Jin Nahawand (only first two notes used) - G, A (the G overlaps, which is how Maqam'at are formed)

Taken out of cultural context, this "scale" is equivalent to Phrygian Dominant

Intro ♩ = 55

E. Piano

Vox Men

Shaker

?????

Kick

E. Bass

Iqa Karachi (arabic rhythmic pulse)

Iqa Malfuf (another arabic pulse)

Bass line entirely in D minor pentatonic. Lovely juxtaposition against the arabic ostinato.

Yasunori Mitsuda's thoughts on this track, from the Chrono Cross OST liner notes:

I broadly synchronized this to the movements of the dwarves. If the timing's right, it should look like the dwarves are dancing.

I hope, anyway... This map had both a sense of pop and a sense of mystery, so it was tough trying to attend to both of those elements.

I'm not sure what he meant by "sense of pop", but I certainly hear the mystery. I can also hear the lovely musical eclecticism that makes these soundtracks so great loud and clear in this track. In Mitsuda's own words:

When I listen to this collection of music, the one thing I admire is that I'm able to achieve a well organized form out of seemingly disparate sounds. Could that be my greatest accomplishment!?

One of them (accomplishments), I would say, and certainly an inspiring one. In Chrono Trigger, Mitsuda wanted to create a "timeless" feel to the music, mainly through the creative combination of traditional and modern compositional techniques. In Chrono Cross - a game that takes place almost entirely on an exotic, fantastical archipelago and centers around the search for a mystical, storied relic called the Frozen Flame - he wanted to draw upon every folk music tradition he get wrap his ears around to make the player feel like they were truly "not in Kansas anymore". To that end, he succeeded greatly.

When I turn off the music and look at the notes and instrumentation, the whole thing looks so silly. A concert harp paired with an electric piano? An Udu, Darabuka, and Kick Drum? And what about the harmony? An arabic maqam playing right alongside a funk-inspired minor pentatonic bass line? But what's "silly" on paper turns to magic in the hands of a creative, sincere, and fearless composer like Mitsuda, whose heartfelt desire to move the player emotionally and challenge pre-conceived notions of what's musically "acceptable" in a soundtrack has forever changed the medium of video games for the better.

3 **A**

E. Guitar

E. Piano

Vox Men

Udu

Shaker

Darabuka

?????

Kick

E. Bass

No Muscore General SF for an Udu, sorry...
There should also be a Jaw Harp in here, but no SF for that, nor notation.

The musical score is written for a multi-instrument ensemble. It consists of two measures. The E. Guitar part is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. The E. Piano part is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. The Vox Men part is in bass clef. The Udu part is in treble clef. The Shaker, Darabuka, and Kick parts are in treble clef. The E. Bass part is in bass clef. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and accidentals. There are also some annotations in the Udu part regarding Muscore's handling of certain instruments.

5 By emphasizing the m2 interval and contrasting it with a P4 leap, this motif sounds very mysterious and vaguely threatening.

The musical score is arranged in a multi-stem format. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- E. Guitar:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. The first measure contains a motif starting on B-flat, moving down to A-flat (m2 interval), then up to D (P4 leap), and then a series of eighth notes. The second measure continues the motif.
- E. Piano:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. The first measure contains a steady eighth-note melody starting on B-flat. The second measure continues the melody.
- Vox Women:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. The first measure contains a steady eighth-note melody starting on B-flat. The second measure continues the melody.
- Vox Men:** Bass clef, key of B-flat major. The first measure contains a steady eighth-note melody starting on B-flat. The second measure continues the melody.
- Udu:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. The first measure contains a steady eighth-note melody starting on B-flat. The second measure continues the melody.
- Shaker:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. The first measure contains a steady eighth-note melody starting on B-flat. The second measure continues the melody.
- Darabuka:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. The first measure contains a steady eighth-note melody starting on B-flat. The second measure continues the melody.
- ????:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. The first measure contains a steady eighth-note melody starting on B-flat. The second measure continues the melody.
- Kick:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. The first measure contains a steady eighth-note melody starting on B-flat. The second measure continues the melody.
- E. Bass:** Bass clef, key of B-flat major. The first measure contains a steady eighth-note melody starting on B-flat. The second measure continues the melody.

So what's the point of all this eclecticism?

- Bass line keeps the music fun, enjoyable; the player doesn't take this area too seriously (as that would detract from the seriousness of *other* areas of the game - important to keep a sense of grand tonal perspective for an entire soundtrack)
- The kick keeps the rest of the reverb-drenched rhythm "glued" together. The ???? (I have no idea what it's supposed to be) acts as a "snare", while the Darabuka takes hi-hat duty. Udu and Jaw Harp are decorative, adding colorful sounds that sound distinctly non-western.
- The choir adds a layer of menace, especially the bass.
- The electric piano and guitar have a tone (much easier to hear in the actual track) that adds a "haziness" to the overall timbre, selling the listener further on the environment of a mysterious, dangerous marsh.
- The percussion is not your average timpani, snare, and cymbals. This is not Kansas (the Jaw Harp and Udu sell that especially well)

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E. Guitar



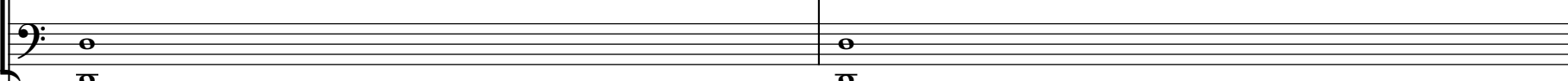
E. Piano



Vox Women



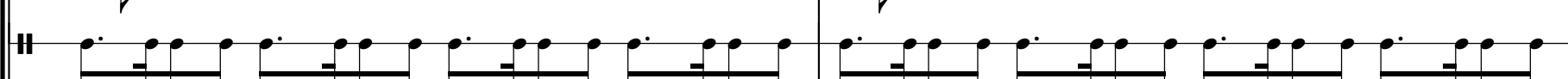
Vox Men



Udu



Shaker



Darabuka



?????



Kick



E. Bass



9 **B**

E. Piano

Harp

Vox Women

Vox Men

Vlns.

Vlas.

Vcs.

E. Bass

pizz.

mp

pizz.

f

pizz.

Pizzicato strings, in this context, are mysterious. The decrescendos make them sound like distant creatures chirping at the player.

Ab Mixolydian b6
This time, roughly equivalent (note-wise) to Raga Charukeshi (Carnatic tradition)

Quartal/Quintal harmony keeps tonality somewhat ambiguous, allowing for multiple tonal centers to be dwelled upon.

Both bass and cello hover around Db, suggesting that as tonal center. This suggests the scale this measure is based in is Db Melodic Minor. This supports the Mixolydian b6 in the harp (it is a mode of Melodic Minor)

Dm7 Fm7 Ebm7 Dm7

A short measure of planing m7 chords bridges to a new, more mellow section. Instead of dwelling on one mood throughout, Mitsuda keeps it interesting and tells a bit of a story. It's as if the player is taking a bit of a rest after navigating a particularly tough area of the swamp.

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E. Piano

Harp

Vox Women

Vox Men

Vlins.

Vlas.

Vcs.

E. Bass

In this measure, all the elements combine to suggest a C Dorian scale.
 Thus, we have a vamp between a Db tonal center and a C tonal center.
 Straight-laced function harmony is obscured by a wealth of quartal harmony as well as
 extended tones emphasized in high and low registers (which are heard better than middle).
 Straight out of Mitsuda's playbook.

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E. Piano

Harp

Vox Women

Vox Men

Vlns.

Vlas.

Vcs.

Shaker

Darabuka

Dum.

Low Drum

E. Bass

Percussion returns to bridge the listener into the next main section.

15 8

Fl. Flute staccato sounds mischevious and quirky, strongly suggesting the character and tone of the Dwarves that live in the marsh.

E. Piano

Harp rhythmic punctuation helps delineate sections

Shaker

Gro.

Darabuka

Dum.

Low Drum

Kick

E. Bass Climbing chromatic 5, b6, 6 degrees juxtaposed against tonic creates infamous "James Bond" sound.

POLYTONALITY

Is this section in C Minor or D Phrygian?

Both!

The Bass and Harp suggest C as the tonic, while the Flute and E. Piano suggest D as the tonic.

The two scales differ only by one note (Ab in C Minor, A natural in D Phrygian). This allows the two to juxtapose without sounding like a cat on a keyboard.

Why do this?

Not only because it sounds cool, but because it sounds *unique*. It serves to help make the music sound more exotic and unusual.

17 8

Fl.

E. Piano

Harp

Shaker

Gro.

Darabuka

Dum.

Low Drum

Kick

E. Bass

HETEROPHONY (SORT OF)

A musical texture under-utilized in a lot of western music, in which multiple lines are variants of the same melodic contour.

This isn't *strictly* what's going on in this section, but it's close enough to warrant study.

1) Notice the notes in red. All the melodic lines are aiming towards that chromatic lilt. They arrive at **slightly** different times, however, and from slightly different places (some by leap, some by step).

2) The flute contour is hardly syncopated and quite smooth (for intelligibility's sake). However, the Bass, E. Piano, and Harp share *similar* kinds of arpeggiation: bouncing from a tonic (C or D) to some kind of tension note. There's hardly any truly contrary motion (a staple of counterpoint). They all generally match each other's melodic direction.

3) The ties in the Bass and E. Piano line up, but the Harp is offset a bit in *some beats*.

4) Like in Polyphony, the harmony is incidental. *Unlike* Polyphony, the lines are not meant to contrast and stand out on their own. Instead, we get this dizzying tapestry of interweaving similar-yet-different lines that all arrive at the same place melodically. This leads to harmony that is *much* less distinct and segmented, hardly chordal at all; it blends and flows horizontally a lot more fluidly than in other musical textures.

So what's the point? Not just novelty - this *also* creates the distinct feeling of "music from a far-off land" (to western ears, at least). It's also a texture that's suggestive of the denizens of the swamp - the Dwarves - and their chaotic, free-flowing yet loosely communal nature.

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Guit.

Harp

Shaker

Gro.

Darbuka

Dum.

Low Drum

Kick

E. Bass

$B^b_{sus^2}$ $A^b_{sus^2}$ $G^b_{sus^2}$ $C^7_{sus^4}/G$

Not actually sus2 chords (there's no resolution of the suspension)
Instead, just handy names to remember the specific chord voicings.

ALSO not actually a sus or dominant chord. Again, just a label to be used as shorthand. In actuality, Mitsuda is doing what he always does: using abrupt modulations between different quartal harmonies as transitions between sections.

There's a synth sound in the actual track I can't reproduce here.