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# Nostalgia in updated videogame music

*Experiencing what could have been*



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## Abstract

This thesis concerns updated videogame music found in the many hyper- and paratextual forms that have been increasingly popular nowadays, such as remakes and remasters. The goal of this study is to analyse how fans and professional alike update videogame music, and how their creative choices affect the nostalgic reception of their works. Particular attention is paid to nostalgia, which is shown to play a significant role in both the production and reception of updated music. A new model is presented to analyse this updated music, based on the inter- and cybertextual work of Genette and Eskelinen respectively. The relationship between updaters, their work and their fans is examined, illustrating how the updating of videogame music is often a highly emotional and nostalgic process for both sides. The model is tested in two case studies, featuring the *Pokémon* and *Final Fantasy* franchises. Each case study contains in-depth analyses of the original track, 2 official updates and 2 fanmade updates. Fan reception is examined using YouTube netnography and comment data analysis. It is demonstrated that updaters make frequent use of their newfound affordances, technological or otherwise. Specific, particularly nostalgic tracks are given special attention compared to the rest of the soundtrack. It is hypothesised that the type of intertextual relationship is paramount in both the production and reception of updated music. Although the updaters all have different strategies, many of them keep the fans' nostalgia in mind in their updates. Some stay close to the original, striving towards authenticity, while others try to create *what could have been*, an idealised version befitting the memory of the original experience. The production and reception of updated music are found to be highly individual processes, and both differ heavily depending on one's experiences.

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## Introduction

What if the great composers like Beethoven and Josquin des Prez had been given the opportunity to update their compositions from twenty earlier they were not entirely satisfied with? Maybe Beethoven would have wanted to move some of the woodwinds' parts of his early symphonies to the brass section, which gained range and usability through technological innovations in the early nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> And maybe Josquin would feel like his *Ave Maria* motet would really benefit from an unconventional fifth voice. Any of the copies of sheet music of their work would be manually altered to include the latest changes, for a price of course. Although we do occasionally find multiple versions of a single work from before the twentieth century, they are usually different due to copying errors.<sup>2</sup> Nowadays however, it is possible to realise such a scenario with relative ease. Films and games especially are changed constantly, using updates, remasters, remakes and the like. Remasters and remakes became a common occurrence in film in the early twentieth century, with for instance silent films being remade with sound, and black-and-white films being remade in colour. This has made them a popular topic in discourse surrounding updated media.<sup>3</sup> Since videogames as a medium have become a more established form of entertainment over the years, remakes and remasters too have become more prevalent there. Part of that is because of the popularity of nostalgia-infused retro gaming, whether through playing retro-inspired modern games, or utilising or modifying obsolete technology. Additionally, with the move to digital instead of physical copies smaller, iterative updates are now an industry standard. Updates, remakes and remasters may not always be appreciated by longstanding fans, but the producers' goal is nevertheless to *improve* the work. Mistakes can be fixed, sound and visual quality can be improved, and different design choices can be made to achieve this goal. If developers do not make the desired changes, some of the more heavily invested fans may decide to do so themselves, creating fanfilms, fangames, fanmade music and other types of texts. Because of the prevalence of updates, remakes and fangames, these topics have been frequently studied in game studies by prominent ludologists such as Jesper Juul and Ian Bogost.<sup>45</sup> Juul has written about transforming analogue games to digital ones, which we will return to later. Bogost focuses on a specific platform and the remakes and demakes of its content. The focus of such ludological studies is usually on gameplay design, writing and to a lesser extent graphics. For this reason, I primarily build on the ludomusicological work of scholars such as William Cheng and Tim Summers.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Ahrens and Irene Zedlacher, "Technological Innovations in Nineteenth-Century Instrument Making and their Consequences," *The Musical Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (1996), 332-340.

<sup>2</sup> Another example would be Mozart's *Requiem*, of which a great many versions exist. All of them are based on Mozart's unfinished work, usually completed using Süssmayr's adaptations and the new composers' own contributions.

<sup>3</sup> Ryan Lizardi, *Mediated Nostalgia : Individual Memory and Contemporary Mass Media* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Jesper Juul, *Half-Real : Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Ian Bogost and Nick Montfort, *Racing the Beam : The Atari Video Computer System* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Tim Summers, *Understanding Video Game Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> William Cheng, *Sound Play : Video Games and the Musical Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Whereas updated music that is not part of a greater work is rare, it does play a substantial role in the updating of film and especially games. Early videogame developers faced many technological limitations. This is especially true for composers, who usually had access to fewer resources than most because music played only a minor role in early videogames. This has left plenty of room for updates, especially for games from the late 80s and 90s. Over time, composers gain more and more affordances, and some may even lose the heavy yoke of games as a medium by creating musical paratexts instead. Being able to produce what you want, unfettered by previous technological limitations, must be a freeing experience, and many arrangers feel the need to make use of these new affordances. Chrono Cross composer Yasunori Mitsuda agrees:

When new hardware comes out, you want to make the music lush, more flamboyant and richer. As a developer, you have these new possibilities. You get the urge to squeeze all the potential out of the new hardware.<sup>8</sup>

We see this happening in most updated music, both fanmade and official. This urge to improve is in constant conflict with nostalgia, a key aspect of videogame remakes music has been shown to be a powerful invoker of. Videogame music and nostalgia have been the subject of many studies, as it has been with nostalgia and games in general.<sup>9,10</sup> However, there is little to no research on the combination of videogame music and updates. This thesis aims to fill that gap. Here, I discuss both professional and fanmade updated videogame music, analysing and comparing different works across times and platforms. In doing so, I will answer the following main research question: How do fans and professionals alike update videogame music and how do their choices affect the nostalgic reception of the works? To answer this question, I suggest a new theoretical model, tailored specifically to the analysis of updated music. Thus, my secondary research question is simple: How well does the updated music model perform, and how can it be improved?

And this is exactly what I aim to examine in this thesis: musical hypertexts, paratexts, and their transformative relation to the original work. In chapter 1, I start by providing some historical background and useful definitions before presenting my adapted model for the analysis of updated music. In Chapter 2, I discuss the fundamentals of analysing updated music, focusing in particular on fans and developers, their relationship and their reasons for doing what they do. Chapters 3 and 4 are two case studies, which serve both as material to answer my research question and as a test for the theoretical model. The first case study (Chapter 3) features two tracks from the original Pokémon games and the second (Chapter 4) focuses on Final Fantasy VI's mini-opera. Finally, I conclude my findings and review the effectiveness of the updated music model.

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<sup>8</sup> SQUARE ENIX, “The birth of #CHRONOCROSS Interview with Original Director Masato Kato and Composer Yasunori Mitsuda,” 56:25, March 8, 2023, <https://youtu.be/rNcJyNaUT3o>, 32:55-33:30, translation my own.

<sup>9</sup> Vincent E. Rone, Can Aksoy and Sarah Pozderac-Chenevey eds., *Nostalgia and Videogame Music : A Primer of Case Studies, Theories, and Analyses for the Player-Academic* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Zach Whalen, *Playing the Past : History and Nostalgia in Video Games* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008).

## Chapter 1: A new model for updating music in games

I will expand on Genette's studies on inter- and transtextuality later, but it is important to discuss the two types of textual relationships we will be discussing a bit sooner, *hypertextuality* and *paratextuality*.<sup>11</sup> The first type is paramount in identifying the relationship between the original work and its adaptations. The *hypertext* is an adaptation or derivative of a *hypotext*, the process of which Genette refers to as a *transformation*. In Barthes' conceptual schema of text and work, the hypotext would essentially be the original work, and both the hypo- and hypertext would be part of the text as a whole. There can be multiple hypertexts grafted upon (in Genette's terms) a single hypotext, examples of which I discuss in the case studies. The second type, paratextuality, is a more contentious one. Some may only consider those things that are directly (perhaps physically) connected to a text paratexts, such as reviews on the back of a book, dustcovers or even titles and subtitles. However, I prefer a more inclusive approach, favoured by for instance media scholars Jonathan Gray and Henry Jenkins. Instead of using the term *extratext*, which can be used to signify texts that are outside (extra) of the original text, I prefer a more inclusive view on the paratext, which includes any site of interpretation that is at the side of, but still part of a text. This way, paratexts include not only those materials that are included with the text by the writers or publishers, but also fanmade and other materials. Especially in the current digital age, texts need not be physically linked to one another to be paratextual. Even across a variety of platforms, reading different media created by official or fan-producers can be seamless, only separated by a single click, button or swipe. Paratexts can even be consumed concurrently, plastered over the main text or fully embedded.<sup>12</sup> Gray writes:

[...] that the item that we're studying, whether it be a film, television show, book, or whatever, becomes meaningful and is interpreted in many sites, some arguably even more important than the site of the thing itself.<sup>13</sup>

To analyse these hyper- and paratextual items of interest, I have constructed a new model specifically designed for updated music. First, I offer some historical background on musical transformations, followed by some essential terms regarding the updating of games and music. Then, I present my model, its inspirations and a short example of how it works in practice.

### Music, transformations and the roots of the cover

Music is by nature a fluidic artform based on repetitions and transformations of anything from melodies to progressions to soundscapes. Further fluidity is achieved through its performance, a momentary setting where musicians and audience play their roles, expressing themselves through their participation. The *work* itself (as in the Western art-historical work) on the other hand, is quite rigid. There are hotly contested rules of authenticity and the score and its composer are held in high regard. Individual

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<sup>11</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Like in fan music mods, which replace the music of a game with something else, or fan dubs for films and shows.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Jenkins, "On Anti-Fans and Paratexts: An Interview with Jonathan Gray," March 2010,

[https://henryjenkins.org/blog/2010/03/on\\_anti-fans\\_and\\_paratexts\\_an.html](https://henryjenkins.org/blog/2010/03/on_anti-fans_and_paratexts_an.html),

[https://henryjenkins.org/blog/2010/03/on\\_anti-fans\\_and\\_paratexts\\_an\\_1.html](https://henryjenkins.org/blog/2010/03/on_anti-fans_and_paratexts_an_1.html).

interpretations of a work mostly take place within the severely limiting performance rules set by the composer, the canon and its experts. Whereas references to an existing work, either overtly through thematic material or more subtle inspirations, are commonplace, updated or remade music is rare.

In early popular music, the score was still at the centre of all music. Many songwriters who aspired to fame came to Tin Pan Alley, the United States' largest music publishing consortium in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in order to sell (the rights to) their songs. The businessmen of Tin Pan Alley used so-called 'song pluggers', musicians whom they would pay to perform new songs they in public, such as George Gerschwin. The focus and fame was split between the songwriters, the performers and the publisher, but later, the public's attention shifted more and more towards the performers, especially after the rise of superstar Elvis Presley. These songs did not always have an original performer and with that, an original performance. A single song could be performed by dozens of famous performers, each performing their own version of the original score. Later, in part because of the popularity of singer-songwriters like Bob Dylan, the focus would shift towards a single, original performance. Thus, adaptations would be new performances of that original performance, rather than of the score. These new performances would be called *covers*, and occasionally *remakes* or the nostalgically tinted term *revivals*. Although there may be financial incentive involved, performers such as cover and tribute bands are often fans of the original work or performer. Most covers are used to pay homage to the original performers or provide a nostalgic experience to fans.<sup>14</sup> In doing so, most coverers do make adaptations based on their own ideas, even though their primary goal is rarely to improve the original.

Occasionally, covers clash with their originals and compete for the same consumers. *All Along the Watchtower* is an interesting example of this. The original song, recorded by Bob Dylan, was released in 1967 on Dylan's album *John Wesley Harding*. The next year, Jimi Hendrix released his homonymous cover on the Jimi Hendrix Experience's *Electric Ladyland* (1968). Hendrix had recorded a few of Dylan's songs before and considered himself a fan of his, in particular praising his lyrics. Although Dylan's original was decently successful, the cover became a smash hit and still is one of the most popular covers around. Like many, Dylan himself considered Hendrix' cover superior to his own original, and even started to include Hendrix' changes into his own live performances. This essentially created a cover of a cover, an iterative process of personalising and improving a piece of music.

## Updating games and definitions

Common terms in updated games and other media such as *remake*, *remaster*, *reimagining* and *update* are often muddy and difficult to define. Nevertheless, it is crucial to at least have a general idea of what the terms can be used to describe. Fans will have significantly different expectations when being offered a 'remake', as opposed to a 'remaster'. However, opinions on what does and does not fit these terms differ greatly, which occasionally leads to complications. Setting the right expectations and upholding them is especially important here, considering fans are essentially buying into a product they already own and are invested in. In most cases, in particular official remakes, remasters and the like, there is a sizeable time gap between the original production and the updated version. It needs to be recent enough for people to remember the original's existence, but old enough for an updated version to actually contribute

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<sup>14</sup> George Plasketes, *Play it again : Cover Songs in Popular Music* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010).

something, using the latest technology and creative talents. Therefore, in games, most remakes and remasters are released within 10-20 years from the original.

A commercial *remaster* (occasionally referred to as an *enhanced version*) usually implies that the new version is supposed to be a straightforward upgrade over the original. There are normally no large changes and the same story, music, graphics and other performances are used. Instead, the quality and fidelity of the audio and graphics are improved, using new technology not available at the time of the original release. Most remasters are also *ports*, meaning they are designed to run on a different platform than the original. Newer platforms afford higher quality audio and graphics, and remasters are a common way to utilise that. Although that is what I believe most people, myself included, would expect from a remaster, it is an approximation rather than a definition.

A *remake* usually implies more significant changes than mere fidelity updates. Although the story tends to stay at least similar to the original, all other aspects of the work are freely adapted. As a result, a remake can be strikingly similar to the original, or a different genre entirely. Likewise, its music can be completely new, or the same MIDI tracks using higher quality samples.<sup>15</sup> Even though the term invites some creative freedom, consumers do expect more effort from a remake than a remaster. In film, every scene is usually entirely reshot, although the script and cinematography can remain similar or even the same.<sup>16</sup> In games, most remakes are also rebuilt from the ground up, which means the entire code is written anew. A *reimagining* is essentially a remake, although it does imply that more impactful changes have been made as compared to the average remake. The use of several terms with such overlap is so problematic to developers and fans alike, that some decide to work around them. The 2020 ‘remake’ of Square Enix’s classic RPG *Final Fantasy VII (1997)* has the ‘Remake’ subtitle. Fans expected, because of the subtitle, that the remake would cover the entire original. However, it is only part one of three and covers roughly the first 15% of the original game. Because of this, the story diverges from the original, which has drawn critique from many fans. The second part, to be released in 2024, has the ‘Rebirth’ subtitle, instead of for instance ‘Remake Part 2’, and diverges from the original even more. The title is supposedly intentionally different because of changes to the story. I might call the trilogy a reimagining, but at this point, it hardly matters anymore what term we use. Not everyone follows the same rules.

What is important however, is the type of material I am referring to by *updated* music. Although an update could refer to just about anything that alters something, there are a few aspects of what constitutes an update that are imperative to keep in mind.

- i) An update adapts something which already exists, meaning that *time* has passed between the original and the update
- ii) Adaptations are usually designed to make the work more *suitable for its new context* (such as the consumers’ needs, the producers’ ideas and new technologies)
- iii) The updated work is (usually) supposed to *supersede* the original, serving as an improved version rather than an alternative

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<sup>15</sup> Musical Instrument Digital Interface (or MIDI) is an interface between a digitalised performance and for instance its output, recording and editing tools. The digitalised performance parses the input of notes, lengths and timings, and can turn that in what is essentially a digital score.

<sup>16</sup> Such as in the shot-for-shot remake *Psycho (1998)*.



Note that whether the updated work actually fits its new context better (ii), and whether it actually improves and replaces the original (iii), is entirely subjective. However, the particular individual the definition is pertaining to is the producer of the work, in our case an arranger or composer, and not the consumer. Even if the producer might end up thinking that their work is not an upgrade either, it was likely their initial goal.

Among fanmade paratexts and hypertexts, there are many that do not fit this rough definition of an updated work. Even though the creators' goals and ideas can be difficult to discern, it is important to at least roughly demarcate the type of materials I intend to discuss so we have a place to start. There are many types of fanmade VGM, some of which are not dissimilar to our updated music. Most fanmade VGM I would consider *covers* or *arrangements*, which is a term many people prefer.<sup>17</sup> Merriam-Webster defines a cover as "a recording or performance of a song previously recorded by another performer." Like in our updated music, covers are based on an existing work. What is or is not the same song, and thus what is or is not a cover, is about as subjective as the similar discussion about updates and improvement. However, the focus of covers is on the performer and their performance, rather than any changes made to the original. Although some may consider a specific cover an improvement over the original, it is by nature an *alternative*, regardless of any individual opinion. The most common covers are simply referred to as covers, individual or group performances performing the same track in a similar style to the original. Alternatively, there are covers in specific styles, such as jazz covers, vocal covers and the very popular metal covers. Another common type of fanmade VGM is the *remix*.<sup>18</sup> Although remixes usually refer to electronic music such as EDM, it is no less broad a term than a cover, and many genres of music are used. Likewise, we cannot call remixes non-live or arrangements rather than performances, as live EDM performances usually consist almost entirely of music that is remixed on the spot. Whereas covers do not necessarily contain adaptations, remixes contain them by nature. We might consider remixers to make adaptations *for the sake of adaptation* instead of to improve the work, but in the end, the producers' goals may be to improve the work either way. The last, common term fans tend to use to describe their music is *remaster*. Although a remaster in games and film tends to refer to a rather straightforward quality upgrade, fans use the term regularly for anything from the same track using higher quality samples to a complete overhaul, including new countermelodies and the like. Most of the examples of fanmade updated music we will discuss will therefore be referred to as remasters.

## Theorising musical transformations

Genette introduces five types of transformations that occur between the original hypotext and one of its hypertexts. Although these transformations are formulated based on Genette's own field of study, literature and narratology, they do provide a solid ground to start with. His five types of transformations (also referred to as *transpositions*) are as follows:

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<sup>17</sup> I intentionally avoid using 'arrangement' for anything in particular, as it is often used for any type of adapted music, updated or otherwise.

<sup>18</sup> Some might consider the remix as a type of cover, which only goes to show how hard (and in the end, perhaps pointless) it is to define these terms.



Formal transpositions:

- (A) practices like translation, versification and prosification
- (B) quantitative transformations like condensation and amplification
- (C) transmodalisations which include changes in the narrative point of view and dramatisation

Thematic transpositions:

- (D) diegetic transpositions which affect the spatiotemporal world of fiction
- (E) pragmatic transpositions which modify the events or action in a plot<sup>1920</sup>

Genette first distinguishes between formal and thematic transpositions. Formal transpositions are not intended to have a substantial effect on the meaning of the text. Instead, they affect the mode or form of the text, a musical example of which would be to translate the lyrics of a song (A) or play a track on loop (B). Such changes would not alter the meaning of a text per se, although the text can be experienced very differently by its readers and gain meaning there. Thematic transpositions on the other hand, do affect the meaning of a text and are explicitly designed to do so. These would include what are essentially the *creative decisions* the text's creators have made. Comparing the hypertext to its hypotext brings these decisions to the foreground. Not only can this grant us insight into the creative processes behind the practice of remaking, but it also makes us reassess the decisions made in the creation of the original work. A musical example of this would be to alter its tonality or a melody, which can be considered to represent diegetic (D) and pragmatic transpositions (E) respectively.

Markku Eskelinen's *Cybertext Poetics* is in many ways a ludological successor to Genette's work on intertextuality. Inspired by Jesper Juul's studies on the adaptation of analogue games (such as soccer or a board game) to digital games, Eskelinen provides some examples of the types of hypertexts that might be created:

- (A) partial implementation or simplification, leaving out game states which could be implemented
- (B) amplified implementation, implementing original game states while adding new states to them
- (C) reductive adaptation, an adaptation containing only game states that could be faithfully adapted
- (D) amplified adaptation, an adaptation with qualitative changes in some of the adapted game states
- (E) augmented adaptation, an adaptation with new game states compensating for game states that could not be adapted.<sup>21</sup>

Eskelinen starts by distinguishing between implementations and adaptations. Implementations fully actualise aspects of the hypotext, although not necessarily all of them, whereas adaptations include

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<sup>19</sup> Genette, *Palimpsests : Literature in the Second Degree*, 212-268.

<sup>20</sup> Tonguç İbrahim Sezen, "Remaking as Revision of Narrative Design in Digital Games," in *Interactive Digital Narrative*, ed. Hartmut Koenitz and others, Routledge, 2015), 258-271.

<sup>21</sup> Markku Eskelinen, *Cybertext Poetics: The Critical Landscape of New Media Literary Theory* (Continuum International Publishing, 2012), 253-258.

creative changes.<sup>22</sup> The important elements to consider here are the descriptors amplified and augmented. Amplification implies a qualitative, supposedly faithful improvement. Augmentation on the other hand could include any type of changes, qualitative, quantitative or otherwise. According to Eskelinen's description, this would be limited to *forced* changes, caused by for instance technological limitations during implementation.

The four types of transformations I suggest are specifically designed to suit music, and music recordings in particular. Although I describe them as 'transformations', they can also be seen as manifestations of the goals and design choices of their creators. By analysing the different transformations as such, we indirectly gain information regarding these goals. However, we do need to keep in mind that this information passes through a filter. The effects of certain changes may not be intended, while some intentions may not be immediately apparent. Creators may be forced to make changes, or they may feel forced to make changes for the sake of change. Dividing transformations in categories makes it easier to discern between forced and voluntary changes, and the reasons behind them.

Using these ideas as a basis, we can formulate a similar subdivision of transformation that fits updated music. The easiest type of transformation to start with would be Genette's (B) *quantitative transformation*, which essentially boils down to altering the *breadth* of a track. Quantitative transformation is especially common when adapting early videogame music, primarily because of the lack of storage space. Early storage media were extremely limiting, affecting all aspects of development from programmers to composers. The first videogame music was added more as a 'why not?', rather than a pre-planned aspect of games. The gameplay already required a substantial amount of storage space for the time, and so graphics and sounds were extremely repetitive to make as much use of the budgeted space as possible. As access to storage space and higher quality audio improved, videogame music became less repetitive and less focused on MIDI tracks. As an illustration, some early videogame tracks were no longer than eight monophonic measures, played on repeat indefinitely. Currently, atmospheric tracks are occasionally ten minutes or longer, sometimes even over an hour of high quality audio. It is safe to say, in most cases (except for handheld devices), composers do not face storage limitations anymore. A secondary reason for the prevalence of quantitative transformations is that videogame music has simply become more important in relation to other components. Especially the big-budget game developers frequently hire prominent composers and orchestras and it would be a waste to have them play 30-second repetitive tracks.

For these reasons, most quantitative transformations are amplifications, although occasionally condensation does get used. Being able to increase the length of a track by twenty seconds might already reduce the number of repetitions by a third. The most basic example of a quantitative transformation is *looping* a track. Whether or not we can consider a looped track in a game a transformation at all would be debatable, but I do consider looped fanmade paratexts transformations. Game soundtracks continue to consist of mostly looped tracks, outside of the film-like cutscenes, which tend to utilise music that is closer to film music. Most platforms that feature videogame music do not provide a repeat button, and so the single 50 second track that fans may have listened to for hours only plays for that mere 50 seconds. The most popular tracks get looped for 30 minutes, or even up to 20 hours, and the resulting videos often

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<sup>22</sup> In a sense, we could consider implementations to be like ports and remasters, and adaptations to be more similar to remakes.

get more views than the directly extracted short tracks, even though the effort required to create such videos is rather low. There is little interaction between the creator and the consumers – it is a matter of *accessibility*, rather than creativity or sharing personal ideas.<sup>23</sup> Most other types of amplified tracks involve the writing of new material to increase their length. Such transformations will also likely fall under one of the other categories of transformations I will discuss later. Do note that we are specifically referring to adding new material to increase the breadth of a track here. The old material is still included in its original state or one close to it.

The second type of transformation I wish to introduce is the *qualitative transformation*. ‘Qualitative’ may be a contentious term to use, as it can insinuate a change in value or worth. However, I am using it here specifically to denote a change in state or nature, making it most similar to Genette’s first formal transposition (A) and Eskelinen’s amplified adaptation (D). In many cases, qualitative improvements take the form of sound fidelity, which was particularly low in early VGM. Early VGM consisted of a few beeps and blips, limited to a single channel that was to be shared with the game’s sound effects. This meant that sound effects often interrupted the music, which is why the two were often only played in separate situations. As technology advanced in the 80s and 90s and the Nintendo era began, developers gained access to sound chips capable of creating several types of sounds. The Nintendo Game Boy (GB) sound chip for instance offered two wave channels (one for sweeping and one for constant tones) also known as ‘pulse’ channels, a noise generator often used as drum machine and a fourth wave channel capable of playing back a limited amount of low quality recorded sounds. Composers were forced to invent creative ways to play around these rules. Many drew inspiration from counterpoint (Bach, specifically) and other techniques in Western classical music, which heavily shaped videogame music even after technological limitations had faded. These four channels still had to be shared with the sound effects, which frequently caused certain parts to temporarily disappear. For illustration, in *Pokémon Red/Blue/Yellow* (1998) the first pulse channel is used for the countermelody, but also for the ‘low health’ sound, a repeating perfect descending fifth on E-A. So, when the low health sound is supposed to play (which can play for minutes at a time), the countermelody is entirely replaced with an often heavily dissonant sound indicating danger. One might consider a simple extracted track on YouTube a qualitative transformation for that reason alone.

However, with qualitative transformations I am primarily referring to changes in sound fidelity and instrumentation. Very few remakes use the same hardware as the original, which means that arrangers have to either try and reproduce the original sound or change the instrumentation. In most cases, this would be considered an upgrade. Why use some sound that somewhat vaguely reminds one of a harp, when one can afford to use a sampled or real harp instead?<sup>24</sup> This is of course a matter of preference, as I will discuss later. Although in many situations developers are forced to make changes, they also often decide to replace certain instruments with an unrelated other. In most cases the old bleeps of early VGM are quickly replaced, but it may be difficult to replace them without significantly changing the sound of a track. Although the Game Boy sound chip clearly has its disadvantages, it also produces its own unique sound. As evidenced through the popularity of chiptune music, sound chips are no lesser musical

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<sup>23</sup> Nico Carpentier, "Differentiating between Access, Interaction and Participation," *Conjunctions* 2, no. 2 (1201, 2015), 7-28.

<sup>24</sup> Whereas contemporary videogame composers and arrangers face few hardware limitations, some of the earlier remakes were made in the early 2000s, an era where they had no such luxury.

instruments than its classical analogue alternatives. Many chiptune performers play their instruments because of an interest in the sound they can produce, instead of for instance nostalgia or fandom.<sup>25</sup> Reproducing the sounds of these sound chips can be challenging, but there are many tools available online such as soundfonts (essentially sample libraries) which mimic specific sound chips and game sounds, and MIDI files of most popular early VGM. Especially for official updaters, it is not a matter of technological affordances.

To achieve these qualitative transformations, many professional and fan-producers alike nowadays use Digital Audio Workstations, also known as DAWs. DAWs have revolutionised the music production industry, allowing even a novice producer to swiftly (re)produce a piece of music. Using a DAW and the soundfonts and MIDI files I mentioned earlier, I could reproduce any popular retro videogame track in a matter of minutes, even though I have little experience using DAWs. Afterwards, the software allows you to edit the track to your heart's content. Although this all sounds nice and accessible, the reality of it is somewhat less ideal. Whereas the fanmade soundfonts and MIDI files are usually free, professional DAWs are extremely expensive for an amateur producer, costing up to thousands of euros. Because of this, many amateur producers resort to piracy. Additionally, hardware requirements are also not insignificant, which can add another financial barrier. Finally, although reproduction using premade tools can be reasonably straightforward, most other actions are more demanding, requiring knowledge of music theory, instruments and software.

Qualitative transformations can also refer to transformations in *fidelity*. In most cases, audio reproduction quality is severely bottlenecked by hardware, rather than recording quality. Therefore, qualitative transformations often do not change the performance or the MIDI, but instead solely update the reproduction of that original performance. Such transformations occur most commonly in (official) remasters, alongside similar transformations to the graphics and sound effects. This is one of the least contentious types of 'upgrades' among fans, although no (updated) work is free from critique. In fact, some fans criticise remasters not because of their disagreement with the changes, but rather the lack thereof.

The third type of transformation I would suggest is the *augmentative transformation*, which I consider a mix between Eskelinen's amplified implementation (B) and augmented adaptation (E). While quantitative transformations alter the breadth of a track, augmentative transformations alter the *depth* of a track. The original material is often still the focus of the piece, but it is augmented by adding harmonies, countermelodies and other reinforcing musical techniques. As I noted before, the earliest videogame music was entirely monophonic. The number of parts afforded to the composers grew slowly in time, to the four channels on the Game Boy (1989), eight on the Game Boy Advance (2001), sixteen on for the Nintendo DS (2004), and as many as the composers or arrangers wish to fill in the current era. Although sound channels played a large role before the 2000s, after that many consoles did not use dedicated sound chips anymore. Instead, recorded or generated audio was played back through audio file formats such as .wav or .mp3. Using digital or analogue orchestras, videogame music slowly shifted away from the bleeps and boops and to the more bombastic orchestral tracks more reminiscent of film

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<sup>25</sup> Kenneth B. McAlpine, *Bits and Pieces : A History of Chiptunes* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019).

music. Updated music tends to follow that shift as well, especially when the original music was already inspired by western classical music.

The fourth and last type of transformation I call *revisionary transformation*. Like Genette's thematic transpositions (D/E), these transformations change the original substantially, altering its meaning. Instead of implementing as much of the original material as possible, the deliberate decision can be made *not* to do so. For example, the arrangers may decide to alter melodic or harmonic material or remove certain instruments. They may even decide to replace a track in its entirety, albeit rare. Nostalgia (and cashing in on that nostalgia) is one of the main driving forces behind updated music. Out of all the transformations, revisionary transformations have the largest possible influence on this. Humming along with your favourite tunes of the past when the updated track changes the melody might feel incongruent, ruining the re-experience. Revisionary transformations also include revisions made due to the hypertext's new *context*. Many (especially modern-day) games are highly stylised, meaning they follow a certain style across all aspects of a game. A retro game might use both 8-bit music alongside 8-bit graphics, even if they could use orchestral music. A cutesy game using Japanese 'chibi'-style graphics is likely to keep the music relatively simple.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, remade games are not necessarily created in the same style as their hypotext, which may inspire arrangers to revise the original music to fit its new context better. The goal of such transformations is to improve the work, which the music is only a part of. Revisionary transformations are unique in that there is much overlap between revisionary transformations and the other types. Changing an instrument to something entirely different would fall under the category of qualitative transformations, but it is also a revisionary one. Turning the original main melody into a countermelody would be a revisionary transformation, but the simultaneous inclusion of a new main melody would be augmentative.

### Final Fantasy Prelude

To illustrate all this, let us look at one of the most updated videogame tracks of all time: the iconic Final Fantasy prelude. Every single Final Fantasy game, including most spin-offs, contains at least one version of the theme. Most of these games may not be remakes, but I do consider many iterations of the prelude updated music. Although the plot, gameplay and even genre of the individual instalments of the series are often unrelated, the series is bound together by a few recurring elements. Among these elements are magical crystals, specific character names (such as Cid), certain monsters, and this prelude, which serves as a prominent leitmotiv played during every opening screen and at several points throughout the game. The original was composed for the first *Final Fantasy* (1987) game, released on the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) by Squaresoft (now Square Enix). Composed by legendary videogame composer Nobuo Uematsu, the first prelude consists solely of long arpeggios.<sup>27</sup> In the original, Uematsu uses only a single pulse channel. Although the NES sound chip accommodates five channels, Uematsu only used one due to having about 10 minutes to write the track as a last minute request, because the director figured it would be nice to have music during the opening screen as well.

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<sup>26</sup> Chibi characters are usually childlike and caricaturised, with few details.

<sup>27</sup> MAYFLY01, "FF1 NES Music – Prelude," YouTube Video, 0:52, February 19, 2009, <https://youtu.be/dPkoNICjQFI>.

## Prelude - Final Fantasy I

Composed by Nobuo Uematsu

Figure 1: Score containing the first 4 measures of the Final Fantasy I Prelude (transcription my own)

## Prelude - Final Fantasy II

Composed by Nobuo Uematsu

Figure 2: Score containing the first 4 measures of the Final Fantasy II Prelude (transcription my own)

In his first arrangement for *Final Fantasy II* (1988) on the same platform, Uematsu only makes two types of transformations: 1 qualitative and 2 revisionary transformations.<sup>28</sup> Firstly, the arpeggios are played using a slightly different sound and significantly more reverb. Secondly, Uematsu slightly alters the lower

<sup>28</sup> CidPrime, "Final Fantasy II NES – Prelude," YouTube Video, 0:46, August 31, 2016, <https://youtu.be/HLGN2FP779s>.

end of the arpeggios and moves the key from Bb to C. In the original prelude, the quadruplets are reinforced by use of octaving and a repetition of the first quadruplet in every arpeggio but the first. The second version, and every version thereafter, sticks with the simple root-second-third-fifth pattern (mixing minor and major) for the entire piece. Compared to the original, this creates a feeling of flow, focusing on the larger arpeggios rather than the quadruplets. Seeing as Uematsu wrote the piece in such a short time, it is unsurprising he would make revisionary changes. After these changes, no other revisionary changes would be made to in-game versions for decades.<sup>29</sup>

Once the series switched to the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) for *Final Fantasy IV* (1991), Uematsu made a few more changes, which he was afforded by the technological advances the SNES offered over the NES.<sup>30</sup> Firstly, this fourth version is slightly longer, elongated using existing material and given an ending instead of a loop: quantitative transformations. In terms of qualitative transformations, the *Final Fantasy IV* version uses a cleaner, harp-like sound, which would be the instrument of choice in most of the following versions. As an augmentative transformation, the updated version adds bowed strings and an organ about halfway through. The strings serve a mostly harmonic role and the organ provides a (counter)melody to the consistent arpeggios. Over the years, Uematsu and the other arrangers would create dozens of other versions, applying mostly qualitative and augmentative transformations. 14 years after the first prelude, Uematsu wrote that he would not have expected it to become such an iconic staple of the series.<sup>31</sup>

Table 1: Musical transformations in 3 versions of the *Final Fantasy Prelude*

Transformations	Prelude – Final Fantasy II	Prelude – Final Fantasy IV
Quantitative	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New material, including an ending</li> </ul>
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Altered sound slightly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harp-like sound</li> </ul>
Augmentative	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Added bowed strings</li> <li>• Added melodic organ</li> </ul>
Revisionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transposed to C</li> <li>• Changed to more patterned arpeggios</li> </ul>	

The case studies in chapters 3 and 4 will follow a similar principle. Using a variety of tools depending on the type of console, I first extract the raw sound data. This sound data is then converted, through MIDI, into sheet music, which usually still needs heavy editing. In cases where tools are unavailable, I transcribe the music by ear or adapt fanmade work. Using VGM visualisation software I visualise the original sound data, compare it to the score, and subsequently analyse it alongside its performance in the game. After I present the track in its original context, I perform the same data extraction and visualisation for the other versions, allowing me to analyse them in relation to one another using the model I have presented.

<sup>29</sup> Heavily arranged versions on soundtrack albums and later in for instance *Final Fantasy XIV* (2014) do exist, but these are arrangements, rather than updates.

<sup>30</sup> OSTGamesHQ, “Final Fantasy IV / II USA (SNES) – Prelude,” YouTube Video, 2:10, April 2, 2018, <https://youtu.be/I9XSXVP8j7U>.

<sup>31</sup> Nobuoematsu.com, “Nobuo Uematsu Email Exchange,” archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20061115045825/http://www.nobuoematsu.com/nobnoj.html>.

## Chapter 2: The fundamentals of analysing updated music: updaters, fans and nostalgia

In this chapter, I will discuss the reasons why one would update (videogame) music and who the updaters and consumers are. Updates have been in increasingly high demand over the past decade, and recently supply has followed.<sup>32</sup> But why is demand so high? And is supply simply following demand, or are there other reasons why many developers turn to re-releasing old works instead of creating new ones? Outside of videogames, there is also a definite demand for different versions of existing music. There are plenty of remade and remastered films that are intended to replace the original, and that includes the score. Nevertheless, in music the concept of ‘updating’ is largely alien. Most alternative versions of music are covers and live performances such as live albums and tribute bands. Many of these are created by people other than the original creators and serve a different role than the original. This is why I aim to provide some much-needed background information on the people and material I am studying.

Here, I mostly focus on the producers and consumers of updated VGM and their rationales, rather than the music itself, which will be discussed in the case studies. I take angles from both the fans’ side and the developers’ side. The fans’ side is twofold; fans function primarily as consumers, but may also perform a producing role. Although the developers’ primary role is that of the producer, they too may be heavily invested in their work, seeing it as more than merely a job and considering themselves fans as well. Their motivations, although highly particular, may also be surprisingly similar to the fans’. First, I discuss official updated music from the side of the developers, going into why videogames and VGM are being updated. I focus on the composers and arrangers by analysing their opinions on their works and the process of updating itself. Then, I move to the side of the fans, starting with how I personally view fans and related concepts. After that, I direct my attention towards the types of fanmade updated music and their creators by looking at some examples of why they produce and share their work. Next, take a brief look at the critical reception of updates in videogames in preparation for the case studies. Finally, I examine one of the primary motivators behind updated music in *nostalgia* and its relation to concepts such as immersion and escapism, presenting my own ideas alongside those of other nostalgic scholars.

### Official updated music, their composers and arrangers

There are a variety of reasons why a developer might decide to re-release one of their own works, but it would be disingenuous not to start with the obvious: money. To illustrate: Japanese developer Square Enix released six different remakes and remasters in 2022. According to the Famitsu sales rankings, in Japan, four of these outsold every other game they released from the start of 2022 until the writing of this text in early 2023. Needless to say, nostalgia sells. You know which games sold well originally, and demand for a known product is easier to gauge than an original, creative work. They are safe bets, and the money gained by re-selling old works can be used to finance new works. Like the sale of paratexts and other merchandise, it is partly about offering fans that are willing to spend more money on their

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<sup>32</sup> Even if updated games tend to take less time to produce than original work, most modern-day games tend to be in production for 3-6 years, which explains the large gap between supply and demand.



favourite games or franchises more ways to do so. Alongside the financial incentive there are usually other reasons to update a game, the primary one being *accessibility*. Fans may say they *need* a remake or remaster if they are particularly fanatical, but in many cases, they may not be overacting. There are many reasons why games might not be accessible to fans. Firstly, many older games are not obtainable directly, as physical sales have simply stopped. This means people have to rely on third-party sales, which can be incredibly expensive.<sup>33</sup> The producer for the remastered edition of *Chrono Cross* (2000) called *Chrono Cross: The Radical Dreamers* (2022) Koichiro Sakamoto stated in an interview that they started working on the remaster because they were worried the game would become unplayable because of changes to one of Sony's distribution systems.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, older games frequently require equally old technologies, which are often dated, broken or otherwise bothersome. The solution to this is often emulation, made possible by the sharing of fanmade emulation software and archived games. A third reason would be a lack of localisation. Many non-western games are localised in at least English and occasionally a few other languages, but there will always be people who prefer a different language. Some fans fix this issue themselves, either by using translation software such as the neural network-based translator DeepL or by doing the translation work themselves. Considering these fans already have a sufficient command over the language to do the translating, their endeavours revolve around the community. Essentially, they like a game so much they wish for other people to play it as well, and fan-translations make that possible for more people.<sup>35</sup> Lastly, not only the hardware, but also the software is inaccessible in terms of modern expectations of games. Graphics, music and other aspects may be of low quality by modern standards, which may make it difficult for newer players to get into. The nostalgic sounds of 1980s sound chips may not appeal to those born in the 00s, which is why many updated games 'modernise' their music to attract different audiences. James Newman might consider all of this a matter of planned supersession, a business strategy to keep selling more products, but I do not intend to continue this discourse any further here.<sup>36</sup>

Because of their own investment in their work, developers are often excited to be given the opportunity to update their work. Although they may have some say in the matter, neither developers nor composers ultimately decide which works are being updated. That decision is usually made by the corporate side of the company, especially in the large companies that produce the bulk of all remasters and remakes nowadays. If a game is slated to be updated, there is no guarantee the same developers and artists will be enlisted again. Many updated games are not developed by their original developers, and their music is not always arranged by the original composers either. The process of adapting an existing artwork someone put their heart and soul in is intimate and poses many challenges. For this reason, some of the updating developers may decide to talk with the original developers in order to better understand their feelings and ideas. The original developers are given an advisory position with no actual control over

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<sup>33</sup> Rare games, even in subpar condition, can cost hundreds of euros.

<sup>34</sup> SQUARE ENIX, "The birth of #CHRONOCROSS Interview with Original Director Masato Kato and Composer Yasunori Mitsuda," 6:30-6:45.

<sup>35</sup> Some fan-translation projects are gargantuan, such as The Geofront's localisation of the 1.7 million Japanese characters of *Trails to Azure*, which would span over 4000 pages.

<sup>36</sup> James Newman, *Best before : Videogames, Supersession and Obsolescence* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012).

production, but their inclusion in the process is often greatly appreciated by the updaters. Chrono Cross' producer Sakamoto says:

“By listening to the stories of people working on the development of [Chrono Cross] and all the hands-on work, you could really feel how they felt at the time and their emotions when making the original. By working on the remaster we could see how things were back then. ‘Fun’ isn’t the right word but we could sense how difficult it must have been and how much they must have struggled to make the game, but it was a really meaningful expression to sort of share in their emotions.”<sup>37</sup>

In a sense, this makes the process of official updating similar to fan activities, but whereas most fans interact with the developers through playing a game, the updating developers do so more directly by looking at that which lies below all of its layers, or even through direct dialogue with the creators.

Fans and developers are often compared based on their highly contrasting roles of consumers and producers respectively, which I have been doing frequently here as well. However, many videogame developers too are fans, and I find it important to consider them as such. You might find developers to be your ally or opponent in a multiplayer game, or you might find their representations or avatars somewhere in a single-player game. Like many artistic professions, developers are usually not in the game for the money. In fact, they tend to get paid fairly low salaries and recently there have been several scandals in regard to working conditions, workplace culture and crunch.<sup>38</sup> Many developers play their games themselves and like fans, they are heavily invested in them. Videogame composers are no different. For instance, one of the most prolific Japanese videogame composers well-known for his chiptune music, Yuzo Koshiro, frequently interacts with fans online about his work. He shares his own (paratextual) arrangements and his thoughts about videogames and videogame music. In a video about the upcoming remasters of *Etrian Odyssey I, II and III* (2007, 2008 and 2010), he talks about how he managed to reproduce and update his old work using different technology and how he would like for the other games in the series to be remastered as well, so more people can play them.<sup>39</sup> Official updaters might have traded some of their freedom for cultural and economic power, but that does not exclude them from being personally invested. Aside from Koshiro's position of power, he is no less a fan than any other fan-musician.

### Types of official updated music and their challenges

Updated music comes in two primary forms: music embedded in games and music for paraludic consumption such as albums, although the former is also often consumed paraludically, which is what I am studying here as well.<sup>40</sup> Whereas fanmade updated music is most commonly of the latter variety,

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<sup>37</sup> Koichiro Sakamoto, “Chrono Cross Interview: Koichiro Sakamoto On Radical Dreamers And Bringing Classic JRPGs Back To Life,” interview by Jade King, *TheGamer*, April 6, 2022 <https://www.thegamer.com/chrono-cross-radical-dreamers-interview/>.

<sup>38</sup> Ben Gilbert, “Grueling, 100-hour work weeks and 'crunch culture' are pushing the video game industry to a breaking point. Here's what's going on,” *Business Insider*, May 5, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/video-game-development-problems-crunch-culture-ea-rockstar-epic-explained-2019-5>.

<sup>39</sup> Yuzo Koshiro (@yuzokoshiro), “The first message about Etrian Odyssey HD Remaster #etrianodyssey,” Twitter, February 9, 2023, <https://twitter.com/yuzokoshiro/status/1623733534249844736>.

<sup>40</sup> Sebastian Diaz-Gasca, “And the Music Keeps on Playing: Nostalgia in Paraludic Videogame Music Consumption,” in *Nostalgia and Videogame Music : A Primer of Case Studies, Theories, and Analyses for the*

officially updated music is usually part of a game. Soundtrack albums are commonplace, but they are rarely supposed to improve the original. Most official soundtrack albums simply consist of (a selection of) the music that is found in the game. If no soundtrack album is available, fans extract the music from the game themselves and share their own soundtrack albums. Other videogame music albums are often alternatives, such as orchestral arrangements and piano collections. Occasionally, soundtrack albums do fit our criteria of updated music. Composer Sean Murray adapted his score to *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010) when he was asked to make a soundtrack album to make it easier to listen to paraludically. Due to the way the music is scripted in the game, directly transferring the music to an album would not work without adaptations.

Sometimes one of the arrangement albums serves as an updated music album. Unlimited by the usual technological and medium-related limitations, arrangers go all out in order to make ‘final versions’. *Final Fantasy VI: Grand Finale* (1994) is an album containing 11 of such orchestral arrangements, which its composer and arranger Uematsu has been notoriously negative about. In the liner notes, he writes an extended, heavily emotional message stating how dissatisfied he is with the album and himself.

I am not satisfied with this album at all. The image I had for each song had been crushed to pieces by this. It is not the arranger's fault, nor the performers'. It is because of my lack of trying to ‘defend’ the image of each song, and my trying to escape by saying, "I did not arrange this." Because I did help arrange this.<sup>41</sup>

Uematsu had access to a full orchestra and arrangers, and he was not inhibited by the medium, nor technology. Still, he was dissatisfied because he could not make the perfect work that he had envisioned. For a ‘grand finale’, it fell flat. In the end, he was more pleased with his original work than the updated versions. Around that time, Uematsu formed *The Black Mages*, a progressive metal band that played Final Fantasy music, with some of his co-workers. Most of his work until then had been shaped by a mix of classical and rock/metal influences. The Black Mages’ three albums lean towards the rock/metal side, while retaining some of the original music’s baroque elements. They were a ragtag bunch of middle-aged co-workers arranging and performing Final Fantasy music in their off-time – essentially creating fan music. They just happened to also be Square Enix composers and musicians, working under their company’s trademarks and licenses. The less perfectionistic setting of *The Black Mages* offered them more freedom, and even though some tracks are a bit rough around the edges, it is a generally well-received passion project. Uematsu enjoyed *The Black Mages* so much the group even ended up performing a few live concerts. Compared to making rock arrangements, updating music is a much higher-pressure job, even if it is paratextual.

Some Japanese developers refer to such final albums as ‘Super Arrange Version’ (SAV for short) albums, which is where we will find another example of the challenges of updating music.<sup>42</sup> One of these developers is Nihon Falcom, whose sound team Falcom Sound Team jdk releases updated music albums

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*Player-Academic*, ed. Vincent E. Rone, Can Aksoy and Sarah Pozderac-Cheveney (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2022), 46-66.

<sup>41</sup> Nobuo Uematsu, liner notes for Nobuo Uematsu, *Final Fantasy VI: Grand Finale*, NTT Publishing Co., Ltd., 1994, CD, translated by Kei Eng, <https://www.ffmusic.info/grandfinaleliner.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Note that not all SAV albums contain solely updated music. Some are instead eclectic collections of genre transformations and other types of musical arrangements.

for almost all of their games. Their two major franchises, the Ys and Trails series, currently consist of 9 and 12 mainline games respectively, and all but the most recent games have an accompanying updated music album. The soundtrack of one of their first games *Ys I (1987)* is available in almost a dozen versions, both in the game's many remakes and remasters and in several paratexts. The arrangers of the SAV albums, who are frequently independent contractors, generally maintain the style of the track, but pull out all the stops otherwise. Like the Grand Finale album, their music is designed to be consumed paraludically, not as part of the game. There is no fear of overpowering other elements, and so there is space for extravagance. Where the original soundtracks of the Trails games always contained clear influences from progressive rock, the previously only slightly progressive tracks now boast virtuoso solos and more complex rhythms. Take for instance *Inevitable Struggle*, a track originally found in the fourth instalment of the Trails series *The Legend of Heroes: Trails from Zero (2010)*.<sup>43</sup> The game was initially released only on Sony's Playstation Portable (PSP), a handheld game console with limited processing power compared to regular consoles and computers. Sound quality was limited, everything needed to be clearly audible through the PSP's small speakers and the music had to fit the game's by modern standards dated graphics and gameplay. The SAV released a year later, and the track sounds similar, yet drastically different. It is 90 seconds longer to fit new material, previously synthesised instruments have been replaced by their counterparts and in particular the drums feature more prominently to create a fuller sound.<sup>44</sup> Like many SAV tracks, there is room for solos, which are generally kept out of most VGM. Fan and critical reception was excellent and the comments on YouTube are filled with nostalgia, even for the members of Falcom Sound Team jdk who have since left. Another year later, Falcom released a third version of the track in the enhanced port of the game to the PlayStation Vita.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, this version sounds more like an arrangement of the SAV than the original. This may indicate that the sound team preferred the idealised version of the previous arranger over their own original as well, or simply that both arrangers had conceptually similar goals in mind. Most fans in the comments seem to favour the original and SAV over the third version. At some point, it becomes difficult to arrange an already arranged track even more without moving away from its initial aesthetic. The original and the two arrangements were composed by three different people. The latter two were specifically paid to improve upon previous works of another. Simply saying the track is perfect as it would mean the arranger either does not get paid and they leave the track as is, or the arranger does not get paid and they hire someone else instead. Straying from the intended aesthetic is also not an option, as that might interfere with the player's nostalgic experience. So what if *what could have been*, already is?

Although rare, there are updating composers who feel this way. Whereas other aspects of Chrono Cross such as the graphics and gameplay were "refined" as they called it, the remastered edition offers only a single soundtrack: the original. Considering all of the other updated aspects of the game are entirely optional, the game can be played in as close to the original fashion (disregarding hardware) as the developers managed to make it. Composer Yasunori Mitsuda was "delighted" and "happy for his work to come to life again in a remaster." Even though he was asked to refine his work, just like the original

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<sup>43</sup> Falcom Music Channel, "Zero no Kiseki OST – Inevitable Struggle," YouTube Video, 2:44, February 28, 2015, <https://youtu.be/6XUzviSRwUQ>.

<sup>44</sup> Falcom Music Channel, "Zero no Kiseki Super Arrange Version – Inevitable Struggle," YouTube Video, 4:26, February 10, 2015, <https://youtu.be/4lkaTGNE5ds>.

<sup>45</sup> Falcom Music Channel, "Zero no Kiseki Evolution OST – Inevitable Struggle," YouTube Video, 3:47, March 6, 2015, <https://youtu.be/Gxds6IDKRt8>.

graphical designer, unlike him Mitsuda ended up mostly leaving it as it was. He only ended up with a single qualitative transformation: the removal of some of the noise artifacts caused by hardware limitations. Mitsuda took an “edgy, subtractive approach” to his work on Chrono Cross, essentially limiting the number of parts and notes to that which he found important enough to keep. Instead of stretching the limits of what the Playstation had to offer, he kept things relatively small. Therefore, when he was asked to update his work, there was no reason to make any changes. He explained that, “The way it sounded on the Playstation is everything. It was in its final form. So, I didn’t want to touch it.”<sup>46</sup> Mitsuda might have been content, but there are still several fanmade updated versions of the soundtrack. After all, even the perfect soundtrack is subjective.

## Fandom, fanship and fanmade paratexts

The concept of a *fan* originally comes from the *fanatic*, a term used to describe someone who is extremely enthusiastic about a certain subject. Although the fanatic is one who is excessively, overly interested, the fan is not necessarily so. Fans can range from radical collectors, almost religious zealots, to the more modest individuals with an above average interest in a subject. You could ask any random person at a Taylor Swift concert: “Are you a fan of Taylor Swift?” It is likely that person would answer ‘yes’. A fanatic might then ask that same person: “But are you *really* a fan of Taylor Swift? Do you know her place of birth/weight/favourite food?” Suddenly the fan is not *really* a fan anymore, at least not in the eyes of the fanatic. Although many people consider their identities in relation to others, these identities are not necessarily dependent on others, unless challenged. If that first person had answered ‘no’, that would mean they would not consider themselves a fan, even though they are performing a fan activity. In the end, being a fan comes down to “parallel processes of activity and identity.”<sup>47</sup> This is why fans are often referred to in communities called *fandoms*, with collective identities and group activities. However, that same term is also used to describe them being fans, or fan-ness. An alternative term that is occasionally used as a supplement is *fanship*, which I use here as that concept of ‘being a fan’ or ‘fan-ness.’<sup>48</sup> An extreme example of this can be found in Japanese *dōjin* culture. *Dōjin* are frequently (especially outside of Japanese scholarship) referred to as fans acting out their fandom, as fans are often described in the West. However, *dōjin* do not consider themselves fans, in particular because they do not consider themselves part of a fandom or community. According to Hernández, they are individualistic people with a strong interest in a subject, a fanship they fanatically act out through their activities. Even going to conventions is not about collective identity or sharing interests, but rather about personal gain.<sup>49</sup> In short, in my words fanship refers to (the level of) interaction between fans and their subject, whereas fandom refers to (the level of) interaction between fans and identification with their communities. I interpret fan activities primarily through these two types of interactions and I visualise and compare

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<sup>46</sup> SQUARE ENIX, “The birth of #CHRONOCROSS Interview with Original Director Masato Kato and Composer Yasunori Mitsuda,” 9:30-10:45, translation my own.

<sup>47</sup> Mark Duffett, *Understanding Fandom : An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Stephen Reysen and Jason D. Lloyd, “Fanship and Fandom in Cyber Space,” *Encyclopedia of Cyber Behavior*, ed. Yan Zheng (IGI Global, Pennsylvania, 2012).

<sup>49</sup> Álvaro Hernández, “The Japanese Amateur Textual Production Scene: Activities and Participation in *Dōjin* Cultures,” *Gremium* 3 (2016), 23-32.



them using what is essentially a two-dimensional spectrum of fanship (vertical) versus fandom (horizontal).

The fan activities I discuss in this thesis are primarily fan interactions and fanmade musical paratexts on YouTube, which is a common medium of study for many web scholars.<sup>50</sup> Most such paratexts are single pieces of music, directly related to another single piece of music embedded in the hypotext.<sup>51</sup> There are many popular fan-creators with active communities, who make all sorts of musical paratexts, regardless of their own interests. By including video alongside sound, interacting with their communities and offering participation by allowing other fans to decide on material, these fan-creators grow their communities. In a way, they form a fandom around themselves, making many of their viewers fans of both them and their subject of fandom. Creator The8BitDrummer for instance, allows his viewers to select what he plays by having them donate and send a music video of their own preference.<sup>52</sup> As a result, he frequently covers official and even fanmade videogame music he has never heard of before. If we were to place him on the fan-spectrum, he would score high on fandom, moving towards Jenkins' participatory culture, and low on fanship.

### Types of fanmade updated music

Compared to other musical paratexts such as covers and arrangements, fanmade updated music tends to be a more individual activity. Creators of updated music tend to be situated in the upper left, another extreme on the spectrum. Considering the fact that they are updating and trying to improve their subject of fandom suggests a high level of investment. On the other hand, their viewer counts are often relatively low, and there are fewer interactions between them and their viewers. However, there is one specific type of shared updated music that is often much more community focused: modded music. Mods (derived from modifications) are perhaps the most fitting example of read/write media and Jenkins' rogue readers.<sup>53</sup> Mods are essentially software that is embedded in games, altering them to fit the creators' goals. Because of the effort and knowledge required to create mods, modders often act and share their work in modding communities.<sup>54</sup> Modding communities are frequently studied in the field of ludology, most notably by Hector Postigo and Olli Sotamaa.<sup>55,56</sup> Some mods are designed for fun, by offering alternative or additional elements to the player. Most however, are intended to improve the original, not unlike our updated music. Usually, this is done to improve older games that did not receive remasters or remakes. It is however not limited to older games. A recent example of this can be found in the 'Orchestral Overhaul Mod' a small group of fans made for *Dragon Quest XI* (2018), the latest instalment

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<sup>50</sup> Carol Vernallis, *Unruly Media : YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>51</sup> We could refer to the single piece of music in the game as a hypotext in itself, but that would only complicate things needlessly.

<sup>52</sup> "The8BitDrummer," <https://www.the8bitdrummer.com>.

<sup>53</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers : Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> These can be found on websites such as Nexus Mods or the Final Fantasy-specific Qhimm and Tsunamods forums.

<sup>55</sup> Hector Postigo, "Of Mods and Modders," *Games and Culture* 2, no. 4 (2007), 300-313.

<sup>56</sup> Olli Sotamaa, "When the Game is Not enough: Motivations and Practices among Computer Game Modding Culture," *Games and Culture* 5, no. 3 (2010), 239-255.

of one of Japan's most popular videogame franchises. The game has received "generally favourable reviews" on Metacritic, but its music was a pain point for many fans. Some previous instalments had received fully orchestral soundtracks, whereas *Dragon Quest XI* used an entirely synthesised MIDI-soundtrack, which fans considered incongruous with the updated graphics and gameplay. The mod replaces the entire soundtrack with the official 'Symphonic Suite' albums, which are essentially 'upgraded', live versions of the original soundtrack. The modders state: "Main goal of this mod is to provide the proper auditory experience that is deserving of this masterpiece of a game..." When the game received a 'definitive version' a few years later, the developers themselves offered the symphonic soundtrack as an alternative to the original. Although most modded music serves to upgrade the original, some does the opposite. There are several mods that alter a remake or remaster to use the original soundtrack instead, essentially reverse updating or downgrading it. In some of the more popular games, you might find that there is both upgraded and downgraded modded music available to replace the official soundtrack, if they are not already included.

Occasionally fanmade updates to games and their music are combined, and fans create their own music that is then modded into a game. This could be the hypotext, but also a paratextual fangame, which is often essentially a mod that has almost completely transplanted the original game. Only updating a few tracks would be incongruent, so in most modern cases updating the music of a game is a monumental endeavour. Nevertheless, it is not an uncommon occurrence. For instance, the entire *Final Fantasy VII (1998)* soundtrack, over 80 tracks spanning a grand total of five hours has been updated in the Tsunamods Final Fantasy VII Arranged Soundtrack mod.<sup>57</sup> The two arrangers describe it as "a faithful representation of the original soundtracks to keep the nostalgia intact" and "to bring the quality up to a more modern standard". This fits the motto of the Tsunamods community: "breathing life into old games". The same group also updated the graphics, interface, sound and just about every other aspect of the game in order to keep the updated game cohesive. Essentially, they created a complete remaster, an immense participatory effort by the community. Although the primary goal may be to improve the experience of the player, making the game more accessible also plays a role. Like the especially fitting example of fan-translations, updated music and graphics also make the game more accessible to new players, and in turn will make it so more people play the game. We might consider this an almost altruistic act of granting others a boon at the cost of the fan-producer's time, but the fans themselves also have much to gain. According to Melanie Swalwell, they might enjoy the thought of having others play their favourite game, especially with their music or other modded content.<sup>58</sup> This in turn increases community interaction, making it so that fans can discuss their fandom together. Additionally, making their subject of fandom more popular makes it so developers will be more likely to support it in the future. Essentially, productive fans are part of what Matt Hills refers to as *fan-conserved imaginary worlds*.<sup>59</sup> Similar to theories on intertextuality in which the paratexts we study here are part of the text as a whole, fans effectively conserve their subject of fandom by being culturally active. By sharing their

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<sup>57</sup> "[FF7 PC] Arranged Soundtrack – Tsunamods Community," accessed July 28, 2023, <https://forum.tsunamods.com/viewtopic.php?t=4>.

<sup>58</sup> Melanie Swalwell, "Moving on from the Original Experience: Philosophies of Preservation and Dis/Play in Game History" in *Fans and Videogames: Histories, Fandom, Archives*, eds. Melanie Swalwell, Helen Stuckey and Angela Ndalianis (New York: Routledge, 2017), 213-233.

<sup>59</sup> Matthew Hills, "Fandom," in *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 274-280.

own works and ideas, they are both cohabitants and conservators of the imaginary world they are fans of. In some cases they might even act as quasi-official conservators. The development team of OpenRCT2, an unofficial updated version of *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* (2002), commissioned the original composer of the game to compose new material. The community pooled together enough money to pay the composer's salary, who was delighted to do so given his newfound affordances.

Glad you enjoyed it. I wanted to do what I always set out to do in the originals.. start with a real fairground organ! This time I didn't have to fake it and managed to find a real recorded one. I have added hints of the first and second themes for nostalgia.. I didn't want it to be entirely new as I know people have memories of the originals. @allisterbrimble1<sup>60</sup>

### Fan-creators and their consumers

When performing fan netnography or in fact any kind of ethnography, one comes across the same issues. Whichever group or community one studies, any information gathered is limited to what is made available by its members. In our case, this means we are for instance limited to the musical paratexts that are actually shared, which could be only a fraction of what is produced. The producers that do share their work on websites such as YouTube and OCReMix are by no means obligated to further participate in the fandom. As I noted earlier, many of the fans who share updated music do not have as many visible interactions with the fandom as other fan-producers do. They rarely use original video material, for instance showing their own play, as most of their music is not live recorded. Because of this, they often lack the delegated enjoyment or *interpassivity* that many other VGM fan-producers do offer.<sup>61</sup> Some however, do share their live recording equivalent by showing them playing the track in a DAW. It might not be as intimate as a video recording showing the performer's (physical) musical skill, but it is similarly transparent. All in all, the fans I seek to analyse are highly elusive, and perhaps occasionally even reclusive, which is why I spend more time on analysing their work and those who consume their content. Among consumers we are similarly limited to the information they share, which usually comes in the form of comments on media-sharing websites and forums, and other assorted commentary such as reviews. On YouTube, most users are *flâneurs*, who anonymously stroll past the variety of content the platform offers.<sup>62</sup> In their activities, they do interact minorly with the producer and other consumers by automatically adding to the view count, or perhaps by clicking the like-button. Those who do elect to interact with the community through for instance comments are but a small subset of the fandom, which is estimated to be around 10%, but on YouTube seems a lot closer to 1%.<sup>63</sup> These interacting fans are more interested in the fandom than the fanship-focused consumers who keep interaction to a minimum.

The most popular two platforms for such fanmade music are YouTube and OverClocked ReMix (OC ReMix). YouTube is at this point a well-known platform, offering accessibility, interaction and (supposed) participation to producers and consumers. Consumers on YouTube may be fans, but the platform allows for non-fans to stumble upon fanmade music as well. Most interaction on YouTube happens in the form of creating videos and writing comments below the videos of others. Although

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<sup>60</sup> Deurklink - Theme Park Games!, "New OpenRCT2 Theme - Song Reveal!" YouTube Video, 4:33, May 15, 2023, <https://youtu.be/NkvaRXyJOTM>.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Pfaller, *Interpassivity: The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Tester Keith, *The Flâneur* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor Francis Group, 2015).

<sup>63</sup> J. van Dijck, "Users Like You? Theorizing Agency in User-Generated Content," *Media Culture and Society* 31, no. 1 (2009), 41-58.



videogame soundtracks nowadays are often available on music streaming platforms such as Spotify, I will usually use YouTube in my musical examples, as it is simply more accessible to most. Compared to YouTube, OC ReMix is more similar to a forum than a media sharing platform. They have contests, curate music and even publish their own albums. Because of this, its participants are usually more invested in the subject and the community than the regular consumers on YouTube.

Many fans who make videogame music do so out of both a passion for their subject of fandom and music in general. Some are even inspired by the passion of others.

I saw all these people online who were really passionate about what they do, and these people are like really good at stuff to the point where they feel compelled to put it online and share it with other people.

@RichaadEB, videogame music metal arranger on YouTube<sup>64</sup>

The passion these fans portray has grown over the years, starting from their first experiences in their youth. After consumption and appropriation, the performing of fanmade music is like the ultimate culmination of their fandom. For some, their passion may even move them past making fanmade music and into becoming a professional videogame music composer.

This has always been about me pursuing my passion for videogame music. For me to keep doing that, at a higher and higher level, I need to make some changes.

@insaneintherainmusic, former videogame jazz arranger on YouTube, now videogame composer<sup>65</sup>

Whereas many of the other VGM-producing fans focus on their passion and the enjoyment they find in making music, the fans who produce updated videogame music specifically frequently speak of their nostalgia instead. Their viewers too are heavily nostalgic, with sometimes up to half of the commenters on a video explicitly or implicitly mentioning their nostalgia. Inspired by their fandom and nostalgia, they find themselves heavily invested.

I grew up around video games and music, and now I find myself engrossed in creating them, assets inspired by them, and learning new ways the two can mingle. Seems appropriate, all told.

@Dracula9antichapel, arranger of Tsunamods' Final Fantasy VII remastered soundtrack<sup>66</sup>

Many of them explicitly mention their goals, as they try to remaster their favourite works as befitting of their subject as possible. They aim for *authenticity*, which they gain not only by staying as close to the original as they consider fitting, but also by sharing their nostalgic feelings and memories.

We strive to work on many different games from many different generations, giving them the best possible remaster/restore we can give them.

@ChurchofKondo, group that shares a variety of remastered music of Nintendo games<sup>67</sup>

I hope you enjoy, and that listening to this video evokes as many memories for you as it did for me making it! I really tried to capture the same ambiance the original songs conveyed to me.

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<sup>64</sup> GameLark, "RichaadEB Interview || VGM Metal Covers," July 9, 2015, 29:55, <https://youtu.be/x9P0gO5dPyQ>.

<sup>65</sup> Insaneintherainmusic, "I'm Done Being a Content Creator.," YouTube Video, 37:49, January 1, 2022, <https://youtu.be/9nJ2otNy1cs>.

<sup>66</sup> Dracula9AntiChapel, "About," accessed July 28, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/@Dracula9AntiChapel/about>.

<sup>67</sup> Church of Kondo, "About," accessed July 28, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/@ChurchofKondoh/about>.

@Nintempo, creator of Mario and Zelda remastered/remade music<sup>68</sup>

As usual with matters of authenticity, what is and is not considered authentic is highly subjective. Some take an exclusionist approach, by characterising alternative fanmade VGM as ‘not the same’.

I remaster music I grow up liking, and have shaped my taste in music. I have been looking for years for a higher quality versions of most of several pieces of music from Video games, anime, movies and more. I searched over Youtube and Soundcloud and was able to find mostly remixes, which are nice but yet never like the original. I wanted better recordings of what we had back then. Many old music pieces were usually presented in low quality recordings due to the limitations of the studios' budget or the console's sound capabilities. And that is why, I took upon myself the duty of remastering these pieces I liked by myself as much as I can.

@Remastered VGM, creator of general remastered VGM<sup>69</sup>

Others attempt to discuss the semantics of what should or should not be considered a remaster, even in the YouTube comments.

Respectfully I think this is not a remaster but a new recording. Though it sounds very well done!  
@m00nglass41

[...] All I'm saying is that "remastered" isn't really the right word. I'd say more like "arranged", or something similar makes more sense to me. Although, if they're 100% accurate MIDI's, and they were played using the original uncompressed samples that were used for the game, then you could probably use "remastered", or, more traditionally now, "restored". @scmtuk3662

[...] My goal when doing songs is primarily to try and capture the essence/vibe of what the original conveyed. I don't like to alter or add to a song's melody (aside from occasional flourishes). I may change instruments or add some, but it's still in an attempt to make it capture the vibe of the original rather than create a genre-based arrangement. [...] @nintempo<sup>70</sup>

These fans realise that this is a sensitive subject and try to be considerate of the creator's feelings. The commenter assures the creator that they enjoyed their work but remain in disagreement on the use of certain words. Creator Nintempo clearly wishes to distinguish their work from the more common genre-transforming arrangements by focusing on what they consider the essence of the original music. Definitions and semantics aside, to me this does capture the spirit of updated music: to try to improve upon the original while keeping its essence intact.

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<sup>68</sup> Nintempo, “The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Remastered Soundtrack – Nintempo,” Video Description, [https://youtu.be/z3jfzUfVB\\_0](https://youtu.be/z3jfzUfVB_0).

<sup>69</sup> Remastered VGM, “About,” accessed July 28, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/@remasteredvgm2333/about>.

<sup>70</sup> Nintempo, “The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Remastered Soundtrack – Nintempo,”

## Critical reception

Fans are fanatical consumers who are heavily invested in their subject of fandom. They tend to have high expectations and some of the more intense fans may consider themselves more expert than even the producers of their favourite works. Fiske writes:

Fandom typically lacks the deference to the artist and text that characterizes the bourgeois habitus: so soap opera fans often feel that they could write better storylines than the scriptwriters and know the characters better (Fiske 1987) and sports fans are frequently at odds with the owner's policies for their teams.<sup>71</sup>

Videogame fans are perhaps the best example of this in the contemporary era. With the availability of online loci for fan critique such as forums and review websites, sharing one's opinion on something online for everyone to read has become easier and easier. Videogames, especially online games, have a disproportionate number of such online communities, more than most other media. Additionally, because of the nature of the medium, read-write media consumption is more common in video games. The combination of fans and updates tends to bring out the most critical of opinions. Especially nowadays, updates are ubiquitous among all genres of videogames, not merely online ones. Whereas in other cases such as remade films the original is still available for those who own a copy, physical copies of games have become scarce. Furthermore, there can be dozens of different versions of a game, each an accumulation of the original and every update until that point in time. Even in digital copies, remade and remastered versions frequently replace the original, causing fans to have to rely on archiving to preserve their favourite works. If the latest update 'ruins' a game, fans have no choice but to use an archived version or update the games themselves. These are the kind of heavily invested fans that for instance created the *Orchestral Overhaul* mod. Discontented with the quality of the work, they expected better. It *deserved* better. After all, "fandom celebrates not exceptional texts but rather exceptional readings."<sup>72</sup>

Critics and audience alike are rarely critical of videogame music. Instead, they focus more on visuals, writing, acting and in particular game design. The score is often designed to support, to *underscore*, rather than to draw attention to itself. A weaker, less pronounced score becomes unremarkable and as a result is frequently not discussed at all. By comparison, updated music is often significantly more contentious, perhaps because there is something to easily compare it to. Even though most videogame developers, including composers, tend to be practically anonymous or at least faceless, some of the most fanatical fans even want to be able to direct their emotions at the individual who is responsible. This is especially important in the case of updated music, in which there are often multiple individuals working on the same material. If the official resources are insufficient, some fans decide to do their own research. For instance, fans of the Japanese developer Falcom I mentioned earlier maintain a large spreadsheet containing information regarding all of the developer's music.<sup>73</sup> Falcom Sound Team jdk contracts many different composers and arrangers, and does not always credit each and every one. In the spreadsheet, fans collect information about every single track, both in-game and paratextual, and analyse who

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<sup>71</sup> John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1992), 30-49.

<sup>72</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 284.

<sup>73</sup> "Nihon Falcom (Sound Team J.D.K./jdk) Composer Breakdown Project,"

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1zE387MG1GcGzPsvj7XjwP4Jcg9lz0Bz15yrYtGHpc1I/>.

composed which tracks. When they like a certain track, they know whom to praise. When they dislike a certain track, they know whom to scrutinise. Knowing who the composer is may also change fans' opinions on certain tracks or decisions; even in VGM well-established composers have a certain authority, or cultural capital if you will.

## Nostalgia

One of the main driving forces behind updated games (and many modern games in general) is *nostalgia*. The average age of people playing videogames has increased steadily over the years, rising to over 35 in the 2020s. Considering the fact that the total number of people playing videogames has only increased during that time, the absolute number of adults aged between roughly 25-40 that play videogames has likewise increased greatly. This generation, commonly referred to as the 'Nintendo generation', was born between the mid-80s and late 90s. During that time, Japanese videogame company Nintendo saw a meteoric rise in popularity, starting with the NES and Game Boy, of which 60 and 120 million units respectively were sold. Nintendo consoles hold 50% of spots on the top 10 and top 20 bestselling consoles, turning the company that originally mainly manufactured playing cards into one of the largest videogame companies in the world. One of the primary reasons for their popularity was the establishment of several beloved franchises. The *Mario* series alone sold over 800 million copies, doubling its next nearest competitor, the *Pokémon* series, another Nintendo exclusive. As a result, people who grew up playing these games now make up a substantial amount of the gaming audience. Now all adults, they have significantly more disposable income, making them a prime target audience.<sup>74</sup> Those same large franchises that this generation grew up with still receive new instalments regularly, and of course that includes remakes.

Although nostalgia nowadays is often described as a fuzzy feeling of fond memories of the past, its conception was not at all positive. In 1688, Johannes Hofer coined the term as a combination of the ancient Greek literary words νόστος (*nostos*) used for 'the return home of an epic hero', and ἄλγος (*Algos*), which was used to personify 'pain'. Hofer needed the new word to describe the depressive feelings he found in some of his patients, who were longing for home.<sup>75</sup> The modern term for such feelings would be homesickness, rather than nostalgia. Even though the current perception of nostalgia leans towards it being a positive experience, neuropsychological research has shown that nostalgia and especially music-invoked nostalgia primarily affects emotions related to sadness.<sup>76</sup> This effect is particularly strong in those individuals who are prone to nostalgia, which widely varies between individuals depending on for instance coping style and emotion regulation. However, this sadness is not

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<sup>74</sup> It is arguable whether they are actually the primary target audience for Nintendo, but considering the amount of remakes in gaming in general, this group is definitely the target audience for many other companies.

<sup>75</sup> Diego Filiberto de Fuentenebro, "Nostalgia: A Conceptual History," *History of Psychiatry* 25, no. 4 (12, 2014), 404-411.

<sup>76</sup> Frederick S. Barrett, "Neural Responses to Nostalgia-Evoking Music Modeled by Elements of Dynamic Musical Structure and Individual Differences in Affective Traits," *Neuropsychologia* 91 (10, 2016), 234-246.

necessarily considered a negative experience, and music-evoked nostalgia does tend to have a positive effect on mental wellbeing.<sup>77</sup>

Whereas music in general has been found to be one of the strongest evokers of nostalgia, VGM may have an even greater potential. Videogames are not an altogether new medium, but rather a combination of other art forms and their histories in modern, computer-focused society. Videogames have ample access to the player's emotions; by allowing (or rather, forcing) the player to participate in performative play, the player's choices heavily influence their experience. It is an intimate activity that has the ability to be highly immersive through its use of a wider range of sensorimotor processes than other media. This *immersion* is what drives nostalgia and directly affects the fan-player's investment in the subject. In order to re-experience the autobiographical memory, it needs to have been an immersive experience, one that can be remembered in great detail.<sup>78</sup> This often involves physicality ("where and when did I play this?"), performativity ("what was I doing in the game?"), and of course sound ("what did I *hear* while playing?").

We can theorise musical immersion in videogames using Isabella van Elferen's ALI model, which she describes as "a blending of different music-specific phenomena afforded by involving sound play."<sup>79</sup> The ALI model is composed of three overlapping circles (similar to a Venn diagram), which represent musical *affect*, musical *literacy* and musical *interaction*. Musical affect is used in a similar manner as I did above: the emotional investment of the player in the game's music. Van Elferen uses musical literacy to represent the ability to read the game's musical semiotics and hermeneutics. She writes that "game musical literacy's contribution to immersion, thus, must be characterized by an almost clichéd audio-visual intertextuality."<sup>80</sup> To allow the player to read the game's music better, many developers make extensive use of repetitive or otherwise recognisable elements, which also allows the nostalgic player to remember them better. The third aspect of the ALI model, interaction, can occur in any action the player takes that has an effect on the game's sound design. Even when the player does not explicitly perform the music such as in a music game like *Guitar Hero* (2005), the fact the player's actions cause certain music to be played can be seen as musical performativity. This not only further enhances immersion, but also connects musical elements to sensorimotor processes, in turn enhancing the experience.

Because people usually start playing videogames at a young age, many have spent a significant amount of their formative years with them. It is often a social activity, partly through multiplayer games and partly due to it being a commonly shared hobby. Games are also one of the most common means of *escapism*, alongside literature and music. Literary scholar Michael Karlsson Pedersen discusses musical escapism thusly:

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<sup>77</sup> Frederick S. Barrett, "Music-Evoked Nostalgia: Affect, Memory, and Personality." *Emotion* (Washington, D.C.) 10, no. 3 (06, 2010), 390-403.

<sup>78</sup> Vincent E. Rone, "A Player's Guide to the Psychology of Nostalgia and Videogame Music" in *Nostalgia and Videogame Music : A Primer of Case Studies, Theories, and Analyses for the Player-Academic*, ed. Vincent E. Rone, Can Aksoy and Sarah Pozderac-Cheveney (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2022), 24-45.

<sup>79</sup> Isabella van Elferen, "Analysing Game Musical Immersion: The ALI Model," in *Ludomusicology : Approaches to Video Game Music*, ed. Kamp, Michiel, Tim Summers and Mark Sweeney (Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing, 2016), 32-52.

<sup>80</sup> Van Elferen, "Analysing Game Musical Immersion," 37.

This (Dorschel's) model of a romantic 'evaporation of reality' in the medium of music does not evoke a clear state of euphoria; rather, because it is ultimately an 'escape into the ego', it rather results in isolation, and there is a rift between the ego and the world.<sup>81</sup>

Not unlike nostalgia, escapism is rooted in a general feeling of sadness or discontent with one's current state of life. Also not unlike nostalgia, escapist activities are inherently positive experiences in an otherwise bleak place in time. This may further enhance nostalgic memories to the point where memories might not be entirely truthful anymore, a concept often referred to as *rosy retrospection*. Although older games or other works are often glorified as 'definitely better than the junk they make nowadays', in truth, that amazing work of the past might not feel as enjoyable anymore now given the experiences one has had in the many years between the original experience and now. Historian Joan Scott asserts that:

When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured – about language (or discourse) and history – are left aside.<sup>82</sup>

Updates can bring truth to this otherwise falsified memory, by aiming to recreate the idealised, fragile memory of an experience long ago. They can also controvert it however, making updating a risky endeavour. For example, the GBA game *Advance Wars* (2001) is widely lauded for its catchy music. In the remaster *Advance Wars* (2023) the arrangers make a variety of changes and their work is generally well-received, albeit considered somewhat repetitive by today's standards. Instead of making quantitative or augmentative transformations they offer the option to turn the music off entirely, perhaps out of fear of its repetitiveness ruining the re-experience. They foresaw that looping a two-minute long track for up to an hour might not be appreciated by everyone anymore, even if it is an *authentic re-experience*. In order to avoid having the truth poison nostalgic memories, they offer the option for players to turn the music off and attempt to save them.

According to Melanie Swalwell, nostalgic fans *know* all this, at least at some level. She surmises that "their purism is probably motivated by quite benevolent attitudes: wanting others to be able to have the same joy and pleasure that they had, and to be able to appreciate and value the game in the way they do, which is a much more positive outlook than the rather depressive, pathological alternative."<sup>83</sup> Updates may not be solely created for these nostalgic fans, but they are a significant part of the visible fandom. In the upcoming case studies, we will see many fans leaning towards the pathological as well as many fans leaning towards the positive extreme of the spectrum, even while discussing a single work. I believe that, because of the different ways immersion strengthens autobiographical memory, updated games and their music must mimic important elements of the original closely, lest it causes a rift between memory

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<sup>81</sup> Michael Karlsson Pedersen, "Zittern Und Zweifel. Über Musikalischen Eskapismus in Nietzsches Venedig-Gedicht," in *Nietzsche Und Die Lyrik: Ein Kompendium* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2017), 299-309.

<sup>82</sup> Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991), 777.

<sup>83</sup> Swalwell, "Moving on from the Original Experience: Philosophies of Preservation and Dis/Play in Game History " 220.

and reality. In the case studies, we will see how updaters tackle this issue and how their creative choices are received by the fans.



## Chapter 3: Case study 1: Two tracks from the Pokémon franchise

Pokémon, originally known in Japan as Pocket Monsters (ポケットモンスター), is by far the largest multimedia franchise in the world, outshining even Mickey Mouse and Star Wars by over 50%. The franchise originates from the 1996 Game Boy role-playing games *Pocket Monsters Red and Green*, developed by Game Freak and published by Nintendo in Japan. In the games, the player can catch, train and battle with fictional monsters called *Pokémon*. The games were later released as *Pokémon Red and Blue* (1998) in the west and are still the best-selling games in the entire franchise. After the success of the first games, The Pokémon Company quickly expanded into manga, trading cards and anime, all of which instantly became popular as well. But it did not stop there, as The Pokémon Company further promoted their franchise through films, books and merchandise. Practically all of their media were massively successful when they were released, and still are so nowadays, over 25 years later. There are now several dozen games, hundreds of manga and the anime currently spans over 1200 episodes. Needless to say, the franchise has a large number of devoted fans, many of whom have not only played, but also read, watched and collected Pokémon media. Most Pokémon media were originally marketed towards children, and many of them still are. They use simple language and are often translated into dozens of languages. However, demographics have shifted up significantly over time. The children who played the original Pokémon games in the late 90s and early 00s are now around 25-40 years old. Although many years have passed since then, the sheer number of Pokémon media that have been produced over the years has caused the retention of many, now older fans. The mobile game *Pokémon GO* (2016) has even sparked an interest in the franchise among people over 55. Likewise, the sheer number of Pokémon media has created many entry points for new consumers, making it well-known even among non-fans.

Most Pokémon media are separated in generations, which usually take place in a single land or country and each feature a cast of characters and monsters. The aforementioned games *Pokémon Red and Blue* make up the first generation alongside *Pokémon Yellow* (1999) and the Japan-only Green version, and are often referred to as *Gen 1*. At the time of writing this thesis, the most recent release was generation 9. Even though eight other generations have passed, each with their own fans who started playing that generation as a child, there is a highly disproportionate focus on the first generation in all Pokémon media. Many of the latest games and other media involve iconic characters and monsters from Gen 1, which The Pokémon Company heavily markets. During a quick stroll through an online videogame merchandise shop I spotted that over 70% of all Pokémon merchandise sold in that shop specifically involves Gen 1 iconography. Although one could argue that limiting marketing to a few specific icons is more efficient and effective, it is obvious that *nostalgia sells*.



Table 2: All mainline Pokemon games until 2023

Generation	Console	Games	Remakes
1	Nintendo Game Boy (GB)	Red/Blue/Yellow (RBY)	
2	Nintendo Game Boy Color (GBC)	Gold/Silver/Crystal (GSC)	
3	Nintendo Game Boy Advance (GBA)	Ruby/Sapphire/Emerald (RSE)	FireRed/LeafGreen (remakes of Red/Blue) (FRLG)
4	Nintendo DS (NDS)	Diamond/Pearl/Platinum (DPPt)	HeartGold/SoulSilver (remakes of Gold/Silver) (HGSS)
5	Nintendo DS (NDS)	Black/White (BW), Black/White 2 (BW2)	
6	Nintendo 3DS (3DS)	X/Y	Omega Ruby/Alpha Sapphire (remakes of Ruby/Sapphire)
7	Nintendo 3DS (3DS)	Sun/Moon (SM) Ultra Sun/Moon (USUM)	Let's Go Pikachu/Eevee (remakes of Yellow) (LGPE)
8	Nintendo Switch	Sword/Shield (Sw/Sh)	Brilliant Diamond/Shining Pearl (remakes of Diamond/Pearl)
9	Nintendo Switch	Scarlet/Violet (SV)	

We will be focusing on the first generation of Pokémon games, because of its popularity, the intensity and marketing of nostalgia and the best availability of material. The first-generation games were remade in *Pokémon FireRed and LeafGreen* (2004) for the Game Boy Advance not too long after the originals. The original Game Boy was highly limited in processing power and storage capabilities, which is one of the reasons why the original games contained many bugs.<sup>84</sup> The second-generation games *Pokémon Gold, Silver and Crystal* (1999, 1999, 2000) were released for the Game Boy Color, which offered a colour screen and other small hardware improvements. The Game Boy Advance (GBA) however, provided significant hardware improvements, including higher processing power and a better sound chip. Additionally, Game Freak already released their third-generation games for the GBA, making it significantly easier to produce other games for the same console. This prompted Game Freak to remake the first-generation games to fit their higher standards. The first-generation games were remade again in *Pokémon: Let's Go Pikachu!* and *Pokémon: Let's go Eevee!* (2018). According to the developers, the Let's Go games are remakes of Pokémon Yellow, making them remakes of the original hypertext, rather than the already updated FireRed and LeafGreen.<sup>85</sup> Whereas the original anime series was still frequently broadcasted on television, the original games were not particularly accessible to children anymore.

<sup>84</sup> Some of these bugs turned into iconic playground myths which was *the way* to learn about secrets and rumours before the advance of the internet.

<sup>85</sup> Arguably, Pokémon Yellow is a hypertext itself, as it is an enhanced version of Red, Blue and Green. However, it mostly adds a bit of content here and there.

Game Freak aimed to fill that gap by remaking them for the popular Nintendo Switch and introducing familiar elements from the anime and Pokémon GO.

The original soundtrack was composed by Junichi Masuda, who served as both programmer and the sole composer of the first-generation games. Later, Masuda would take on a directing role alongside his musical work. He oversaw production on most mainline Pokémon games up until the Let's Go games. Although Masuda did work as game director and designer on FireRed and LeafGreen, he did not arrange the original soundtrack himself. This was instead done by Go Ichinose and Morikazu Aoki, who also composed a few new tracks alongside Masuda. Under Masuda's supervision, the soundtrack was once again updated by Shota Kageyama for the Let's Go games. As the Let's Go games are updated versions of the original hypotext (Yellow), the soundtrack should be an update of the original soundtrack as well.

Like most older videogame music, Pokémon soundtracks tend to consist of a combination of active and passive tracks. Passive tracks are played during exploration, slow story sequences and other moments when the player is not engaged in action. These tracks are usually slow to moderate in speed and use pronounced, memorable melodies supported by simple harmonies. Active tracks are used for dynamic moments such as combat, fast movement and exciting story sequences. These tracks are usually faster, with frantic melodies and quick, repetitive arpeggios. Considering the differences between the two general types of tracks, it seems wise to analyse at least one of each.

The most commonly covered and updated tracks are the more passive ones. The obvious reason for this would be that, as is the case in the preference for GBA/16-bit music, it is simply *easier* to adapt. When the key melody that should be included in the adaptation to make it recognisable is fast and highly chromatic, there is little room for creative exploration. Passive Pokémon tracks are great examples of *contagion*, a concept used to describe the vocal traits of an otherwise instrumental track.<sup>86</sup> In other words, its *singability*. Simple, tonal melodies in an accessible vocal range that also happen to be repeated endlessly are contagious; you cannot help but sing or hum along. This sensorimotor process makes the tracks highly memorable, which in turn makes them prime material for nostalgic creativity.

In this case study, I discuss two original tracks in great detail starting with the Pallet Town theme, alongside two official and two fanmade updated versions each. The updated versions are each analysed using the four-part model I introduced earlier, largely in order: quantitative, qualitative, augmentative and revisionary transformations. At the end of each of the two sections, I will look at the reception of the discussed tracks as well as similar material, focusing in particular on nostalgia. Finally, I will compare the two analyses, before heading into the second case study on Final Fantasy IV using the same strategy.

## The Pallet Town theme

One of the most iconic tracks from the first generation and the series as a whole is the *Pallet Town* theme, the track that is played in the first town the player finds themselves in. It is a tiny town, with only three houses and half a dozen inhabitants. It is not only the hometown of the player and their rival in the first generation of games, but also that of their manga counterparts. It is also the hometown of the anime's primary protagonist Ash, the most famous (human) character in the entire franchise. The theme only

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<sup>86</sup> Rone, "A Player's Guide to the Psychology of Nostalgia and Videogame Music", 33-34.

plays in Pallet Town, a small town the player usually quickly leaves and does not return to often, except for when they beat the game and return to their humble beginnings. The same thing happens in the anime, where Ash returns to his hometown at the end of every generation to start anew. Its English name Pallet comes from palette, a wooden board painters use to mix colours and its Japanese name Masara (マサラ) refers to a pure-white, brand-new canvas upon which the player can create their adventures. Considering all this and the fact that Pallet Town is accessible in a total of 13 mainline games, it is clear that Pallet Town is set up to be the most nostalgic place in the series.

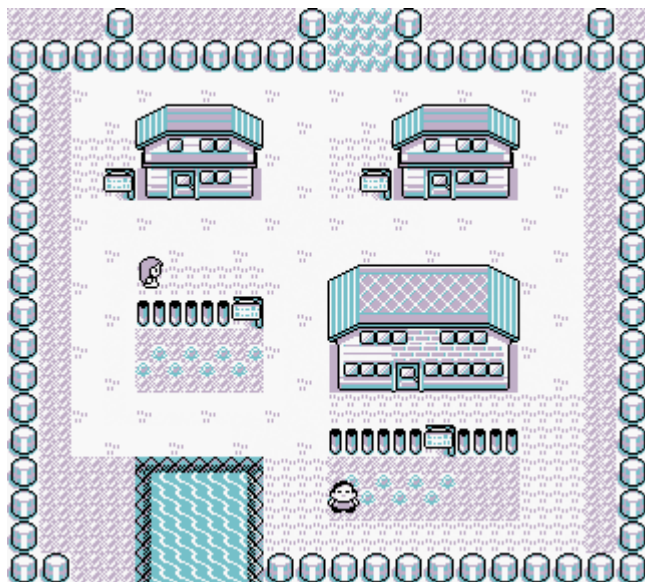


Figure 3: Pokémon Red/Blue/Yellow's Pallet Town

The original theme, composed by Masuda, is comprised of three parts in 16 measures: the main melody, the countermelody and the bass.<sup>87</sup> The score can be found at the end of this section. Like many tracks from the early Pokémon games, the Pallet Town theme is very active, with a new note played on almost every eighth. Whereas the music was heavily limited by technology, the graphics were even more so, which incited Masuda to make his music serve a “greater role in setting the mood and indicating where the player was in the game.” The main melody part starts off with a lively tune in Gmaj, spanning a little over an octave. The countermelody supports the main melody by often moving in the opposite direction and filling in the gaps in the main melody. The syncopated, anticipated bass has a fairly short range of a major sixth, mostly moving around the root G and offering little in terms of harmony. Because of the limitations of the Game Boy sound chip only single notes can be played in the two melodic parts and they cannot be sustained easily. This leaves plenty of space to take a breath, making them easily singable. Because the 16 measures are repeated every 32 seconds, the melody quickly becomes memorable and contagious. Halfway through, the melody gradually slows down in frequency of notes, allowing the countermelody to be more present. Here we see the use of arpeggiated harmony in the countermelody, a commonly used technique in early VGM due to always being technologically limited to single notes per part. Like most other tracks, the melody and countermelody are played on the second and first square wave channels respectively, and the bass is played on the third wave channel which allows for sustained notes. The second wave channel, the melody, is always played slightly louder than the countermelody,

<sup>87</sup> Pokemonmusicmaster, “Pokémon Blue/Red - Pallet Town,” YouTube Video, 1:11, March 7, 2008, <https://youtu.be/cOWRNLaCMJg>.

with the bass being the softest.<sup>88</sup> This further emphasises the melody, which is often the most important part to keep intact during updating. Because the Game Boy sound chip afforded composers few options in terms of instrumentation, there is still plenty of space for creative transformations later. However, Masuda stated that he was largely satisfied with his work, so perhaps he would decide not to make too many changes.

“We’d write music directly on the Game Boy using a special device. For those games, I wrote all the songs and created all the Pokémon cries. I was definitely able to pour everything I had into those sounds. [...] When I listen to this soundtrack, I hear things that I’d like to go back and fix and make changes to, but the majority I really like. I’ll listen and think, ‘Wow, this is really good. I can’t believe I made this!’” Mr. Masuda laughs.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> The fourth channel, a noise channel usually used to simulate drums, is only rarely used in the first generation games.

<sup>89</sup> Pokémon.com, “A conversation with Pokémon’s Musical Maestro.”

# Pallet Town theme - Pokémon Red/Blue/Yellow

Composed by Junichi Masuda

$\text{♩} = 120$

Channel 1 (square wave 1)

Channel 2 (square wave 2)

Channel 3 (arbitrary wave)

5

SW 1

SW 2

AW

9

SW 1

SW 2

AW

13

SW 1

SW 2

AW

Figure 4: Score of Pokémon Red/Blue/Yellow's Pallet Town theme (transcription my own)

### FireRed/LeafGreen's Pallet Town theme

Several years later, Ichinose and Masuda arranged the updated version of the Pallet Town theme for FireRed and LeafGreen on the GBA.<sup>90</sup> The GBA sound chip offers much over its predecessor, such as an additional two channels, and more dynamic and versatile instrumentation options. Using these new affordances, Ichinose makes substantial changes to the original. Whereas the main melody and counter melody are kept largely intact, the bass is replaced entirely, and several new parts are added. Let us walk through the four types of transformations I introduced in chapter x, starting with any quantitative transformations. Although the updated version is still 16 measures long, it is about 25% slower, making it 12 seconds longer than the original. Most updated versions of early VGM try to increase the length of tracks and slowing them down is a way to avoid having to introduce new material. Qualitatively, the updated version makes some notable changes in fidelity and especially instrumentation. The main melody is doubled on the square 1 channel (2) and a sampled channel (6), which starts with a woodwind-like instrument for the first 8 measures and switches to a string-like sample for the latter 8. The countermelody is played on an electric piano-like instrument (1), and the new material is spread across an acoustic guitar (3), square wave 2 (4) and another electric piano (5).



Figure 5: Pokémon FireRed/LeafGreen's Pallet Town

Masuda and his co-workers had already shown the capabilities of the GBA over the GB in the other third-generation Pokémon games *Ruby*, *Sapphire* & *Emerald* (2002, 2002, 2004), in which they frequently use sampled drums, strings and brass instruments. While the old square wave generators are still used in those games, they are usually turned down heavily and rarely serve as the main melody. In FRLG however, the square wave channels are still used for the main melody quite frequently, as is the case here in the Pallet Town theme. Even though it seems like many qualitative transformations were made, the overall sound of the track has changed fairly little compared to the rest of the soundtrack. This is likely a conscious decision by Masuda and Ichinose to keep the soundscape relatively similar to the original in order to induce nostalgic memories in the player.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Pokemonmusicmaster, "Pokemon FireRed/LeafGreen- Pallet Town," YouTube Video, 1:32, April 29, 2008, <https://youtu.be/dfRLeXXsdnM>.

<sup>91</sup> An alternative, less nostalgic explanation would be that sampled music required a significant amount of processing power, so using fewer samples would mean the game runs more smoothly. Additionally, working with sampled music costs a lot more time than the regular, already quite impractical method they used before.



We spent a lot of time making sure that anyone could play these games, so we didn't go too far with new gameplay elements or go too far out there. In that spirit, we took the original songs and added elements to it without changing it too much. – Junichi Masuda<sup>92</sup>

The adding of such new elements would fall into the category of augmented transformations, of which there are plenty. As I noted earlier, the main melody and countermelody are largely intact, with only a few chromatic additions. However, they added three new parts to replace the original bass. Elements of the original bass part such as the syncopation and anticipation are still present, spread across the three parts. The three parts frequently share rhythmic and melodic elements, essentially functioning as a second countermelody with square wave 2 (4) being the most pronounced bass. Although there are three new parts, these augmentations still take a backseat to the melody and countermelody, like the bass did before. The final category, revisionary transformations, are the most difficult to discern. Like Masuda stated in his interview, they clearly tried to stay in the original spirit of the track. However, some changes can be considered revisionary transformations. For instance, the theme was transposed from Gmaj to Amaj. The quantitative transformation, slowing down the original, can just as much be considered a revisionary transformation. Considering the sheer number of parts they added, slowing the track down might have been a way to bring these new parts to light. Or perhaps they simply thought a slower track would fit the comfort of a hometown the most. Finally, replacing the simple bass from the original track with the three new parts shows that Ichinose and Masuda might have considered it the track's weak point. As it was the least prominent part of the original theme, it was also the most easily replaced. Overall, the decision to add more parts and utilise the new affordances are in line with the rest of the game. The graphics for instance were initially heavily limited in colour and resolution, so the updated games offer more colourful and higher quality visuals. However, the Pallet Town theme consists of no more than 6 parts, whereas most other tracks have 7 or more. In fact, the Pallet Town theme is the *only* ambient track with 6 parts in the entire game. Even the tracks which were originally even simpler than the Pallet Town theme have 7 or more parts, stretching the limits of what the hardware can offer. Evidently, Ichinose held back when arranging this particular track more so than others, signalling that he knows how much it means to the fans.

Table 3: Musical transformations in the FireRed/LeafGreen Pallet Town theme

Transformations	<i>Pallet Town</i> – Pokémon FireRed/LeafGreen
Quantitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slowed down by 25%</li> </ul>
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Added new instruments to accompany original ones</li> </ul>
Augmentative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occasional ornamentation</li> <li>• New countermelody</li> <li>• New bass</li> </ul>
Revisionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slowed down</li> <li>• Original instrumentation altered slightly</li> <li>• Bass altered heavily</li> <li>• Transposed from Gmaj to Amaj</li> </ul>

<sup>92</sup> Pokémon.com, “A conversation with Pokémon’s Musical Maestro.”

## Pallet Town - Pokémon FireRed/LeafGreen

Arranged by Go Ichinose

$\text{♩} = 88$

Electric Piano

Square wave 1

Classical Guitar

Square wave 2

Electric Piano

Flute Violin

5

El. Pn.

SW 1

Guit.

SW 2

El. Pno.

Fl. Vln.



2

9

El. Pn.

SW 1

Guit.

SW 2

El. Pno.

Fl. Vln.

13

El. Pn.

SW 1

Guit.

SW 2

El. Pno.

Fl. Vln.

3

16

Figure 6: Score of *Pokémon FireRed/LeafGreen's Pallet Town* theme (transcription my own)

### Let's Go's Pallet Town theme



I wanted Pokémon fans to feel that it was nostalgic, but that it has evolved into something new and gorgeous! – Shota Kageyama on his music for the Pokémon Let's Go games<sup>93</sup>

Figure 7: *Pokémon Let's Go's Pallet Town*<sup>94</sup>

The second updated versions of the original Pokémon games, the Let's Go games, house our third version of the Pallet Town theme.<sup>95</sup> Although the developers might not entirely agree, the Let's Go games seem primarily aimed at new, younger players who have not experienced the original games or even the remakes. Many gameplay elements of the games were simplified for the new audience, but most of the games' content such as text were kept intact. The once again updated Pallet Town theme is, like the rest of the game, mostly based on the first-generation games and not their remakes. Most of the augmentative

<sup>93</sup> Shusuke Motomiya, "Interview with Shota Kageyama," liner booklet for *Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu! & Pokémon: Let's Go, Eevee!* Super Music Collection, The Pokémon Company/OVERLAP, 2018, CD, translation my own, 56.

<sup>94</sup> [https://archives.bulbagarden.net/media/upload/4/45/Pallet\\_Town\\_PE.png](https://archives.bulbagarden.net/media/upload/4/45/Pallet_Town_PE.png)

<sup>95</sup> Video Game Music Resources, "04 Pallet Town Theme - Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu! & Pokémon: Let's Go, Eevee! Super Music," YouTube Video, 1:32, August 31, 2019, <https://youtu.be/3qk1y31E9W0>.

transformations of the previous update have not been included, nor has the track been transposed again. Instead, arranger Kageyama has presented his own creative changes.

In terms of quantitative transformations, no new changes are made other than the slightly slower playback speed. Qualitative transformations however, are plenty. Compared to the FRLG version which ended up sounding fairly similar to the original, the Let's Go version sounds markedly different. Most technological limitations to the music have been lifted, granting Kageyama access to high quality, realistically sampled instruments. The main melody is played on flute(s), and later monophonically on glockenspiel, piano and strings as well. The countermelody is spread across the bassoon, strings and guitar. It is even less present in the first 8 measures than the original, in particular because it is played on a supportive, bass instrument. Instead the focus is on the main melody, supported by a large amount of harmony, which had been inaccessible in the original version. This harmony is mostly enacted using the new pizzicato strings and guitar, forming the largest augmentative transformation in the piece. Overall, all of the original material has been included in some manner, even most of the original bass which the FRLG version left out. However, both the bass and the countermelody are incomplete. The bass is missing a few notes here and there and the upper end of the countermelody has been left out in the first 8 measures, focusing attention even more on the main melody. None of the augmentative transformations are particularly transforming, but the new strings do overpower some of the other material. In the liner booklet, Kageyama says that his approach is to “respect the sound and feeling of the original as much as possible,” and that he was honoured to be entrusted with such an important role by Mr. Masuda.<sup>96</sup> Kageyama did however convince Masuda to expand the “chamber quintet” he had in mind to a larger orchestra, signifying that Masuda might have initially intended to stay closer to the original in terms of orchestration.<sup>97</sup>

Table 4: Musical transformations in Pokémon Let's Go's Pallet Town theme

Transformations	<i>Pallet Town – Pokémon Let's Go Pikachu/Eevee</i>
Quantitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slowed down by 25%</li> </ul>
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher quality sampled orchestral instrumentation</li> <li>• Original material enhanced on multiple instruments</li> </ul>
Augmentative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Added harmonic instruments</li> <li>• Many small additions to the countermelody and bass</li> </ul>
Revisionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slowed down</li> <li>• More orchestral sound</li> <li>• Altered countermelody to be more in the background</li> </ul>

<sup>96</sup> Motomiya, “Interview with Shota Kageyama,” translation my own, 56.

<sup>97</sup> Shusuke Motomiya, “Interview with Junichi Masuda,” liner booklet for Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu! & Pokémon: Let's Go, Eevee! Super Music Collection, The Pokémon Company/OVERLAP, 2018, CD, translation my own, 54.

# Pallet Town theme - Pokémon: Let's Go Pikachu/Eevee

Arranged by Shota Kageyama

$\text{♩} = 104$

Flute

Bassoon

Acoustic Guitar

Horn

Glockenspiel

Piano

Violins

Violas

Contrabass

5

Fl.

Bsn.

Glock.

Pno.

Vlins.

Vlas.

Cb.

pizz.

2nd round only

2

9

Fl.

Bsn.

Guit.

Hn.

Glock.

Pno.

Vlins.

Vlas.

Cb.

arco

Detailed description: This system of musical notation covers measures 9 through 13. It features eight staves: Flute (Fl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Guitar (Guit.), Horn (Hn.), Glockenspiel (Glock.), Piano (Pno.), Violins (Vlins.), and Cello (Cb.). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The Flute part is mostly silent, with a few notes at the end. The Bassoon and Cello parts play a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes. The Guitar part provides harmonic support with chords and some melodic fragments. The Horn part has a melodic line with some slurs. The Glockenspiel part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Piano part has a complex texture with many notes. The Violins and Violas parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with the Violins part marked 'arco'.

14

Fl.

Bsn.

Guit.

Glock.

Pno.

Vlins.

Vlas.

Cb.

Detailed description: This system of musical notation covers measures 14 through 17. It features the same eight staves as the previous system. The key signature remains one sharp (F#). The Flute part has a melodic line. The Bassoon and Cello parts play a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes. The Guitar part has a melodic line with some slurs. The Glockenspiel part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Piano part has a complex texture with many notes. The Violins and Violas parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

According to Masuda, the first round of a track was supposed to be closer to the original, with Kageyama's changes coming in in the second round.<sup>98</sup> The strategy is sound; the music would seem true to the original while also offering an 'improved' version within the same track, decreasing repetitiveness. The difference in round two of the Pallet Town theme is tiny: in measures 5-8, an extra piano is added to the main melody. Although this change is especially small, most of Kageyama's round-two changes are not much bolder, usually adding a single bass or percussive instrument.

Stylistically, the usual move towards grander orchestral music is quite apparent, alongside its overall softer, more accessible feel. However, this is not solely a matter of utilising new affordances or catering to younger audiences.

Again, with the concept of a Pokémon RPG in the modern living room, the music is always going to be on—you're probably not going to turn off the sound like you might on a handheld system. Because the music will be heard throughout the room, everyone will be able to hear it. So we wanted something that would feel kind and inviting—something that everyone in the household would be comfortable hearing.<sup>99</sup>

Whereas all of the previous games were created for handheld systems, the Nintendo Switch also functions as a living room console, often connected to the family television. Taking the nature of games as a medium into account, Masuda and Kageyama chose this musical style to fit the games' new context. The nostalgic audience needs to share the stage with new players and their families, even though they might have preferred not to. Kageyama did include a more nostalgic version of the theme for them, arranged for two acoustic guitars, which plays after the player finishes the game and returns home.

### Other official versions

There are technically two more official versions of the Pallet Town theme that we might consider updates, although they are not part of updates of the original games. The second-generation games (GSC) and their remakes feature part of the content that was also in the original games. Although they refer to the same hypertext as the hypertexts I have been discussing here, these games function as sequels rather than adaptations. The first-generation content was considered an extra, something the developers managed to find time (and more importantly, space) for later on during development. Because of this only about 30% of the original tracks are included. Luckily, yet unsurprisingly, the Pallet Town theme is among those included. The GSC version is significantly different than the original, something which also holds true for the rest of the soundtrack. Most tracks introduce new material, which is often placed in the foreground. In Pallet Town for instance, the volume of the main melody is turned down and the new (counter)melody takes the lead. The updated version (in HGSS) is based on this arrangement in terms of material, but reinstates the atmosphere of the original.<sup>100</sup> Here we once again arrive at the complicated discussion of defining what is and is not updated music. Going by ear, almost instinctively, I would not

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<sup>98</sup> Pokemon.com, "Meet the Makers of Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu! and Pokémon: Let's Go, Eevee!" November 2018, archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20181102103824/https://www.pokemon.com/us/pokemon-news/meet-the-makers-of-pokemon-lets-go-pikachu-and-pokemon-lets-go-eevee/>.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Notably, there are a significant amount of augmentative and revisionary transformations in the HGSS version, even compared to the RBY original.

hesitate to call the fourth-generation version an updated version of the RBY original, whereas I might prefer to call the GSC version an alternative arrangement because of its focus on new material. However, the HGSS version is technically based on the GSC version, rather than the original RBY version. In the end, it comes down to a matter of creative decision making.

“One thing we really kept in mind is that those who played the original Pokémon Gold and Pokémon Silver would notice if we changed the songs, and we wanted to preserve their memories of the games,” Mr. Masuda says.<sup>101</sup>

It appears Masuda preferred something stylistically more similar to the RBY original and its FRLG remake. However, simply basing the new track on either of those would mean the new GSC material would not be included. To avoid clashing with the fans’ memories, they decided to base it on the GSC material, while focusing on the RBY material and the newly added alterations. One angle to look at this is through the first part of my original definition of updated music: *time*. Considering the GSC games game out a mere 1-2 years after the original games, there is little reason to focus on players’ nostalgia. Although they might greatly value their memories of the original games, not enough time has passed to cultivate intense nostalgic feelings. Therefore, it would make sense to arrange the music more freely in the GSC versions, while using a more authentic, nostalgia-inducing approach in the HGSS remakes which came out 10 years later.

### Fanmade versions

Fan adaptations of the Pallet Town theme, as is the case for most VGM paratexts, are predominantly alternative versions. Most popular here are piano covers, orchestral arrangements and remixes, but there are even vocal covers. Because there are multiple official versions, fans can also use different versions as a base for their paratexts. Paralleling the games, the FireRed/LeafGreen version is by far the most popular. Considering the popularity of the GB(C), the GBA and the general popularity of Pokémon, it should come as no surprise that first-generation Pokémon music and their derivatives are very popular among videogame music creators. Interestingly, the original RBY version is one of the least popular versions to remaster. Other types of fanmade music frequently add new material, so the three-channel original is prime material to expand upon. Remastered versions however tend to focus more on the existing material, so the relatively simple three-part track may be too constrictive to work with. Its instrumentation is also more ambiguous than the other versions, making it difficult to remaster without significantly altering the atmosphere. Compared to other developers, Nintendo is extremely aggressive in protecting their copyright after almost losing their trademark due to it being genericised by consumers in the early 90s.<sup>102</sup> For this reason, fan-creators tend to be more careful in how they word things in order to avoid legal issues, especially in updated works, which tend to be more vulnerable to copyright strikes than others.

I have selected a few examples of fanmade updated versions of the Pallet Town theme, based on the rules I set in chapter 1. As I noted earlier, most of these are on YouTube, although I did manage to find some

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<sup>101</sup> Pokémon.com, “A conversation with Pokémon’s Musical Maestro,” March 13, 2014, archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20140514002944/http://www.pokemon.com/us/pokemon-news/a-conversation-with-pokemons-musical-maestro/>.

<sup>102</sup> They even had a major informative campaign called “There’s no such thing as a Nintendo.”



tracks on SoundCloud as well. Many reinforce their nostalgic power with visual imagery, usually of the town itself, such as screenshots or gameplay. Fanart is also commonly used, such as in the case of YouTube user Zame's Pallet Town: Remastered, which uses a nostalgically tinted painting of the town.<sup>103</sup> This fanmade paratext is based on the FireRed/LeafGreen version and is truly a remaster in that it introduces little to no new material. It is extremely accurate, making it somewhat likely that Zame used one of the MIDI files that directly translate the games' musical data into something useable, although many fan-musicians do transcribe music themselves. The theme comes in at little over 2 minutes, in which it is played three times at the exact same speed as the original. This quantitative transformation is likely to make it so that people stay around listening to Zame's work a little longer, as it is in fact something new, rather than something the listener might already know. The theme is fairly short, which is why many people choose to listen to extended versions. Like in many remasters, the qualitative transformations are the most prominent. The old woodwind-like main melody is now a well-sampled woodwind instrument, and the same goes for the xylophone, guitar and piano parts. The single augmentative transformation is the use of a cymbal roll every 8 measures. Cymbal rolls add a bit of fantastical grandeur and are commonly used in orchestral VGM such as the Let's Go games. Considering the track has been remastered to have a more orchestral feel, the arranger must have thought it fitting. Although Zame's version is clearly intended to be an authentic adaptation, they did choose to change the instrumentation slightly: the square wave which played part of the melody is replaced by a single bowed string instrument. The first 4 versions all stick with the square wave at least for the first 8 measures, even the HGSS which could have easily used sampled instruments instead. During orchestration, square waves are usually replaced by other square-wave-like instruments such as brass instruments and free-reed instruments like the accordion or harmonium. Bowed strings are instead usually used to replace sawtooth synths (or the other way around). This is of course, open for interpretation; it is nigh impossible to improve upon a work like this without making at least *some* creative choices. Notably, in the Let's Go version I discussed earlier, arranger Kageyama decided to do the very same thing, replacing the square wave melody with strings. Perhaps Zame was inspired by Kageyama's work, but it may just as well have been pure coincidence. It is worth noting that, whereas the Let's Go version uses an entire violin section, Zame's strings are limited to a single instrument, which does make it sound less orchestral and more like the original, which is quite possibly intentional.

Table 5: Musical transformation in Zame's two remasters of the Pallet Town theme

Transformations	<i>Pallet Town: Remastered</i> – Zame	<i>Pokémon X &amp; Y: Pallet Town (Remastered)</i> – Zame
Quantitative	None	None
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher quality samples</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>XY-like samples</li> </ul>
Augmentative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cymbal rolls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harp intro</li> <li>Occasional ornamentation</li> </ul>
Revisionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpretation of instrumentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More orchestral</li> <li>Mimicking different style</li> </ul>

<sup>103</sup> Zame, "Pallet Town: Remastered ► Pokémon Fire Red & Leaf Green," YouTube Video, 2:11, August 29, 2020, <https://youtu.be/2BQsxO-wUa4>.



Zame also offers a second remaster of the Pallet Town theme. Notable here is the intent of the arranger, in that this version is designed in the style of one of the more recent games, specifically the sixth-generation X&Y games. It is both a ‘what if the games were to be updated this generation’, as well as a nostalgic look back, because at the time of the video’s release several new games had been released already. Fans frequently use the soundfonts I mentioned earlier to update music in this manner, but this is not the case here. The sixth-generation games are the first Pokémon games created for the Nintendo 3DS, a relatively recent handheld console which allows for fully sampled, high quality music created using DAWs. The usual technological limitations have been lifted and many composers slowly move towards more grandiose orchestral music with every new iteration.<sup>104</sup> To fit the newer style, Zame has opted to use similar-sounding samples from orchestral DAWs instead, DAWs they also used for the other remastered version. All of the instruments are moved around with a focus on bells and strings, both of which are commonly used in the sixth-generation games. A similar base MIDI is used, albeit with a few augmentative transformations. Compared to the other remastered version, this version sounds significantly more orchestral, even though the same number of parts are used. As I noted earlier, on the GB/GBA many parts were forced to play in an almost staccato fashion, which can help to distinguish the individual parts. Zame’s other remaster uses little sustain, making it more similar to the kind of music these consoles could play. The sixth-generation update on the other hand uses significantly more sustain, making it sound almost legato in comparison, and in turn more realistically orchestral.

## Reception

Fan reception of the many different updated versions of the Pallet Town theme revolves almost entirely around nostalgia, even more so than most other VGM updates. There is also a notable difference between the reception of these updated tracks and other fanmade paratexts based on the Pallet Town theme. Although many commenters mention their feelings of nostalgia, this is significantly more common in official versions and fanmade updated versions. To gain a modest grasp of how many commenters experience nostalgia I applied text analysis using nostalgic keywords based on the work of Davalos et al. such as “nostalgia”, “memory” and “childhood”, which were some of the most commonly used lemmas. Text analysis was performed using a combination of python-based web scraping and the BUTTER text analysis tool. Primary comments were first scraped from a selection of YouTube videos with at least 50 comments. Then, the text data was subsequently tokenised and lemmatised to prepare it for analysis. A frequency list of n-grams was extracted to check and improve the nostalgic keyword list of Davalos et al.<sup>105</sup> Finally, comments were analysed on the basis of containing these keywords. Any comment containing at least one of the keywords is considered “nostalgic”. Although the keywords do not cover every nostalgic comment and there are some false positives, the resulting data is serviceable for my

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<sup>104</sup> The seventh-generation games are a notable exception, which predominantly feature jazzy, bossa nova and Hawaiian music, fitting the Hawaiian theme of the games.

<sup>105</sup> Sergio Davalos et al., “‘The Good Old Days’: An Examination of Nostalgia in Facebook Posts,” *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 83 (2015), 83-93.

goals.<sup>106</sup><sup>107</sup> Analysis shows that the official versions are particularly nostalgia-inducing, with between 20-45% of comments explicitly mentioning the commenter's nostalgia. Fanmade updated music videos average around 25% nostalgia-filled comments. I intended to use non-updated fanmade versions of Pallet Town as a baseline, but results turned out to be extremely varied. Most videos had no more than a single mention of nostalgia in hundreds of comments, but some comment sections turned out to be even more nostalgic than the official tracks. One of the remixes I came across clocked in at about 30%, which is higher than both the HG/SS and Let's Go versions.

People are most nostalgic about the oldest versions and seem to get gradually less nostalgic in every iteration after. There are several possible explanations for this. Perhaps the nostalgic feelings are further amplified by having played or experienced the many updated versions of the games. The older versions can also be considered by fans to be more original or authentic, a purer embodiment of their nostalgia. People who are fans of the older games are on average significantly older, making the memories they feel nostalgia for much further in the past, deepening them over time. It could also simply be that fans gravitate towards the original after feeling nostalgic about an updated version. The most common keyword turned out to be "old", which was often used refer to the games being old (and older games being better than modern games). More frequently however, it referred to the commenter's age either at the time of writing the comment or at the time of experiencing the memory. Some comment sections turn into a collective sharing of fans' ages, seemingly creating a sense of camaraderie in the fandom, even though the pseudonymised commenters know next to nothing about one another. Smaller loci of fandom tend to be more close-knit, so it would make sense for individuals there to have more personal interactions. However, many YouTube commenters who fondly remember their memories together below these videos will not have interacted with one another at all beforehand, nor will they afterwards. Yet, they often share heavily emotional messages. The bilateral nature of nostalgia seeps through every comment. Many comments lean towards the positive side of the spectrum:

There is no other song in the world that can reduce me to tears more than Pallet Town song in FR/LG. So many memories of my childhood in my crazy childhood amazement seeing a game like Pokemon for the first time. @dumbsow9420<sup>108</sup>

What a lovely, nostalgic piece! So glad to have been with the series since the beginning, and this remix hits home on recapturing those early memories! @JBX9001<sup>109</sup>

However, some other commenters share a more negatively tinted nostalgia. They are particularly focused on their childhood, how everything was better then and conversely how unhappy they are now.

Back then when life was much more easier, when all my loved ones are still here. I listen to this and cry. My childhood is way better than what the present is now @Edmond's World<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Several keywords used by Davalos such as "time" are often used in a nostalgic manner ("time of my life", "during that time", etc.), but they are used in other ways too often to be included in the text analysis.

<sup>107</sup> A list of keywords can be found in the appendix.

<sup>108</sup> Pokemonmusicmaster, "Pokemon Blue/Red - Pallet Town," comment section.

<sup>109</sup> Zame, "Pallet Town: Remastered ► Pokémon Fire Red & Leaf Green," comment section.

<sup>110</sup> Pokemonmusicmaster, "Pokemon FireRed/LeafGreen- Pallet Town," comment section.

You never really knew what you had until it's gone. @jupiter9099 <sup>111</sup>

I feel hollow whenever i listen to this. It's like someone's shouting "Go forth to your adventure in life!"  
@WE Are numBOO one <sup>112</sup>

Fantasy and adventure stories like those in the Pokémon franchise are by nature designed to be more adventurous and exciting than real life, which is why such genres are particularly fitting for escapist use. Many, like the Pokémon games, feature a child protagonist who goes on wondrous adventures, even though they are still young. The by now adult commenters might feel like they have missed the opportunity to have such (decidedly unrealistic) adventures, further amplifying their desire to be a child again. One can replay a game or revert to an earlier point in time, but sadly life does not have such 'quality of life' options.

Somewhat surprisingly, very few fans comment on the changes made in the updated versions, even the fanmade ones like Zame's. Those who do, are undividedly positive about Zame's work. Perhaps Zame's efforts to stay true to the original have diverted attention away from the fact that it is not an official track.

You remastered this so well. Sounds very Gen 6-ish with the flutes and harpsichord. Regardless, I love it. People bash Gen 1 from how often its remade (understood) but man back in 1999 in Pallet Town when I couldn't even read and had to ask my cousin for help with Pokemon Yellow?? I love and miss those little moments; yet I'm reminded of them by great music like this :). Again, awesome work Zame. @FreezingTheMind

Fans do discuss their preferences regarding the official versions on a compilation of the first four versions of the theme.<sup>113</sup> The fans' opinions are about as mixed as they can get; the only consensus seems to be that all four versions are great. Even though some of the versions feature substantial augmented and revisionary transformations, there are proponents of every version. As opposed to some of the more contentious updates such as Inevitable Struggle which I discussed in chapter 1, these are received fairly well. It seems fans are not necessarily against rigorous changes in official updated music, although it remains to be seen if the same goes for fanmade updated music.

## The Champion theme

The Pallet Town theme is one of the most nostalgic themes in the series, in part due to its significance and location in the games. However, it is also important to note that it is a town theme, which makes it fall into the category of passive tracks. So, let us take a look at an active track as well: the *Final Battle! (Rival)* theme in Pokémon Red/Blue/Green/Yellow.<sup>114</sup>

As I noted earlier, active tracks are usually used in dynamic moments, such as fight or flight situations. They usually feature faster and mixed rhythms, dissonance and other ways to increase the tension. Pokémon combat themes are a prime example of these qualities and due to the popularity of the

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<sup>111</sup> Pokemonmusicmaster, "Pokemon Blue/Red - Pallet Town," comment section.

<sup>112</sup> Pokemonmusicmaster, "Pokemon FireRed/LeafGreen- Pallet Town," comment section.

<sup>113</sup> At the time of posting the video, the fifth official version was not released yet.

<sup>114</sup> Pokeli, "Pokémon Red, Blue & Yellow - Champion Battle Music (HQ)," YouTube Video, 2:59, February 2, 2015, <https://youtu.be/nXgAj5KdAC0>.

franchise, a source of inspiration for the soundtrack of many other games. Practically all of the active themes in the first seven generations of the franchise have been composed by one man, Junichi Masuda. I noted earlier that Masuda was the primary composer for the first few games, but later moved on to directing positions within Game Freak. However, he kept composing the battle themes simply because he felt like it was his *thing*, and over time, his colourful music has become an iconic and beloved part of the franchise.

Because I'm a director it's hard to make music, but in the case of Pokémon the battle music has a strong Masuda colour, so I'm writing it again this time.<sup>115</sup>

The Final Battle! (Rival) theme, often referred to as the *Champion theme* or *Blue's theme*, plays during the final battle against the player's rival. The standard name for the player in the first generation is the name of the game (Red, Blue, Green), with the rival taking the opposing colour. If the player manages to beat their opponent, they have essentially beaten the opposing game's 'main character'. The rivalry concerning which game was better was a common subject at school in the 90s. In Yellow, the names offered instead are the canon names in the anime, which might further strengthen players' memories. Many players simply used their own name as the main character and perhaps a friend's or rival's name as the rival, further embedding their real selves in the adventure. Canonically, the main character's name is Red, and the rival's name is Blue (in the west) or Green (in Japan), which is why it is often called Blue's theme in the west. Blue has a second theme in the same game, so I will mostly stick with the Champion theme, even though there is a different Champion theme every game.

Compared to the 16-measure theme we discussed earlier, the Champion theme is substantially longer. Spanning a total of 53 measures, it is the longest track on the soundtrack, and one of the longest tracks in the entire series alongside the final themes of the other games. Although many other tracks are likely to have been kept relatively short to save space, it likely did not affect the Champion theme as much. Perhaps we will see fewer quantitative transformations and other ways to reduce repetitiveness in the updated versions later.

Let me set the stage first, before we get into the music. Like in the anime, the player meets the rival many times during the game. He has a rather abrasive personality, and often boasts about how much better he is than the player (even if he loses). After anywhere between 20 for casual players and 200 hours if you played the game as a child, the player finally arrives at the final battle with the rival, the culmination of many hours of exploring, catching and training. Finally, the player enters the last battle with their rival, saying "I am the strongest trainer in the world." The screen fades to black and the music immediately starts with the iconic combating chromatic lines they have been hearing upon entering battle all game. This time however, there are a few differences. The chromatic lines are more erratic and frantic, with larger intervals mixed in than usual. They are also significantly more dissonant, with constant diminished octaves and tritones. Lastly, instead of using only descending chromatic lines like in the main battle theme, or an ascending chromatic bass like in the boss theme, there is an ascending chromatic (counter)melody, a technique often used in videogames to indicate increased danger.

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<sup>115</sup> Junichi Masuda, "Director's Columns, #172," August 5, 2010, translation my own, <https://www.gamefreak.co.jp/blog/dir/2010/08/index.html>.

The Champion theme starts with a 10-measure intro, to introduce some of the heartbeat-like rhythmic material while the player faces off against their opponent before the fight. Unlike most other tracks which are looped in its entirety, these 10 measures are not repeated. Data-wise, these are some expensive measures of music. In fact, this is possibly the only fragment of music that the player will hear only once in their playthrough. I have divided the remaining 43 measures into 4 sections, as seen in table 6. In the first section, we hear a slow main melody alongside perfect fifths in the countermelody. Section 2 reintroduces an augmented version of the heartbeat intro followed by a chromatically ascending bridge with a frantic countermelody. Section 3 utilises even more chromatic movements, this time primarily in the bass. Section 4 is a repetition of section 1 with a more consistent bassline, followed by a move back to the original section 1. The Champion theme is significantly more active than the Pallet Town theme with very little space for augmentations, especially in the faster sections. It would be interesting to see how updated versions adapt this type of material.

Table 6: Examination of Pokémon Red/Blue/Yellow's Champion theme

Section	Measures	Contents
<b>Intro</b>	1-2	Chromatic lines during screen fade
	3-6	Heartbeat bass intro
	7-10	Arpeggiated intro on E (in inverted Cmaj)
<b>1</b>	11-20	Main melody alongside perfect fifths, starting and ending in Esus2 (7-9b-7)
<b>2</b>	21-24	Augmented heartbeat intro on E (in inverted Cmaj)
	25-31	Chromatic ascending bridge with frantic countermelody starting in E7
<b>3</b>	32-41	Slower melody starting in Gb
	42-43	Gmaj7 move towards section 4
<b>4</b>	44-51	Section 1 with more consistent bassline
	52-53	Return to section 1 through E-Emaj7-E7-E5

As before, there are two remakes of the original RBY games with updated versions of the Champion theme. Blue also shows up in many other Pokémon games and other media and has several different themes, his Champion theme being the most common. It can be found in (among others) *Pokémon Stadium* (1999), *Pokémon Black/White 2* (2012) and *Pokémon (Ultra) Sun/Moon* (2016, 2017), as well as the original Pokémon anime (1997) and another animated show *Pokémon Origins* (2013). Although these official versions all use the same hypotext as a base, I will focus on the two official versions in the remade games in order to avoid having to enter more discussions regarding definitions of updated music versus alternative arrangements.

# Final Battle! (Rival) theme - Pokémon Red/Blue/Yellow (Champion theme)

Composed by Junichi Masuda

$\text{♩} = 172$

Channel 1  
(square wave 1)

Channel 2  
(square wave 2)

Channel 3  
(arbitrary wave)

3

SW 1

SW 2

AW

7

SW 1

SW 2

AW

10

SW 1

SW 2

AW

14

SW 1

SW 2

AW

2

19

SW 1

SW 2

AW

23

SW 1

SW 2

AW

26

SW 1

SW 2

AW

29

SW 1

SW 2

AW

31

SW 1

SW 2

AW

35

SW 1

SW 2

AW

Figure 8: Score of Pokémon Red/Blue/Yellow's Champion theme (transcription my own)

### FireRed/LeafGreen's Champion theme

As was the case in Pallet Town's FRLG update, Ichinose gave the Champion theme a massive overhaul.<sup>116</sup> Surprisingly enough, practically all of the original material is included very faithfully. Much of the material is embellished substantially both rhythmically and melodically, but in absolute terms of specific notes being played at specific times, I could find only 3 changes in the entire piece. All are found in the bass part: the perfect fifths in measures 18-20 and 32-33 are now syncopated, and the ending in measures 52-53 now also has a syncopated bass. Compared to the Pallet Town theme in which the bass was replaced entirely and both the melody and countermelody were changed melodically, this adaptation is significantly more faithful to the original material. Quantitatively, there is not a single alteration. The loop is still the same and even the original 172 BPM is maintained. As for qualitative transformations, there is a slew of changes. The two square wave channels now play different versions of the bass instead of their usual parts, which are spread across the synthesiser and tympani (originally square 1, countermelody), and synthesised voice, horn, electric guitar and strings (originally square 2, main melody). Although the choice of orchestration might seem odd compared to other more classical types of orchestration, many active VGM tracks are inspired by (prog-)rock, especially in Japanese RPGs through the influence of Nobuo Uematsu. It is interesting to note that Masuda considers his primary

<sup>116</sup> Pokeli, "Pokémon FireRed & LeafGreen - Champion Rival Battle Music (HQ)," YouTube Video, 2:59, February 2, 2015, <https://youtu.be/-4vpdkEkup8>.



influences to be electronic music such as Yellow Magic Orchestra, and classical music from the likes of Stravinsky and Bach. He rarely uses distorted guitars himself, but quite a few of the arranged versions of his work do contain them. Due to the switch from 3 to 18 (or 24, depending on your definition) instruments, the amount of work put into making the track technologically feasible is remarkable. As you can see in the score found in the appendix, the 8 primary channels are intricately woven into one another to create the illusion of there being a large rock orchestra. For instance, channel #5 plays 7 different instruments, often switching within a single measure. Ichinose pushed the system to its limits.

The list of augmentative transformations is quite long, but most of the changes do not introduce substantial new melodic material. Instead, they are mostly rhythmic and melodic embellishments, and harmonisations of the original parts like one would do in any classical orchestration of existing material, such as the long arpeggios in section 3. However, the actual harmonisations are quite unconventional. Masuda practically avoided the third during his original composition and Ichinose clearly kept that idea in mind during his arrangement process, using primarily the fifth, seventh and ninth. This way, he did not expand on the existing harmonic progression too much. His rhythmic alterations however, make the track even more nerve-wracking than before. This is because, other than the few rhythmic changes in the bass I noted earlier, all other rhythmic changes are truly augmentative. Using the quasi-drumkit noise generator, arpeggiated piano and distorted guitars, the overall speed of the track is turned up, even though the tempo has remained the same. The original consisted of a mix of fast sections filled with 16<sup>th</sup> notes (such as sections 1/2) and slower sections containing mostly 8<sup>th</sup> notes (such as sections 3/4). Due to the augmentations, there is now no slowing down. This is another example of what I noted earlier in regard to the updating of already rather full tracks – the updated version will simply go even harder.

Looking at the sheer number of changes (there is essentially a move from 3 to 18 instruments), one might have thought that there would be many revisions of existing material. However, as I noted at the beginning of this section, there are only three. Additionally, the key has been changed from Em to Gbm. Although changing the key happens quite often in updated music, it is not necessarily as simple a process as transposing the score by two semitones and running it through the same sampled instruments. Nowadays, MIDI and MIDI-editing software is very accessible, but during the Gameboy era Ichinose had to work with assembly language, which is essentially raw computer code. The Champion theme does show off one interesting advantage of input music like MIDI and assembly language: a live orchestrated version of this track would be extremely challenging to perform.

*Table 7: Musical transformations in Pokémon FireRed/LeafGreen's Champion theme*

<b>Transformations</b>	<b><i>Champion theme</i> – Pokémon FireRed/LeafGreen</b>
Quantitative	<b>None</b>
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rock-like orchestration</li> </ul>
Augmentative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many rhythmic and melodic embellishments</li> <li>• Added harmonisations, drums, harp and many other parts</li> </ul>
Revisionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transposed from Em to Gbm</li> <li>• Small changes to bass</li> </ul>

### Let's Go's Champion theme

As was the case in the Pallet Town example, Kageyama's updated version closely sticks to the original material, mainly upgrading the instrumentation, as he calls it.<sup>117</sup><sup>118</sup> A transcription of the track can be found in the appendix. There are once again no quantitative transformations such as the 'second-round' changes that can be found in other tracks, or a different BPM. Like the FRLG update, Kageyama has opted for a rock-like orchestration, using a wide range of brass and electric guitar to play the main melody, primarily strings for the countermelody and electric and acoustic basses for the bass. Overall, it sounds significantly softer than the FRLG version. For instance, instead of having the distorted electric guitar blast the main melody starting in measure 11 like in the FRLG version, it is carried by the strings and trombone. The electric guitar softly follows with quarter notes after the fact. This was a specific request by Masuda, whom Kageyama consulted with thrice per track, a much more hands-on approach than usual:

I requested him to make it milder because the instrumentation is rock-like, and to make it a little more staccato (playing with short intervals). There are cultures overseas that don't like violent songs, and even a slight change in the length of a note can transform the impression of a song. – Masuda on Kageyama's arrangements<sup>119</sup>

The original Champion theme already contained a significant amount of staccato by Masuda's own design, which is likely why Kageyama did not add any more. Masuda's effort to cater to non-Japanese audiences is likely due to the fact that the international market share of the Pokémon franchise (and many other Japanese media) has been growing steadily over the years.

The augmentative transformations, of which we saw many in the previous example, are equally many in this version. The two arrangers are however diametrically opposed in their approach. Ichinose's augmentations are prominent and serve to further speed up the track and raise tension. Kageyama's augmentations on the other hand are generally more subtle, such as the electric guitar and violins playing a new, simple descending melody in measures 11-4. The most noticeable augmentation is the new drum part, which does include some hard rock-like drum fills. Though they are not as noticeable as the drums, there are actually many more revisionary transformations than one might expect considering Kageyama's approach to arranging. Many of the perfect fifths which caused a sense of danger are now inverted into softer, perfect fourths. Some agitative sections, such as the repeating B-A-E 16<sup>th</sup> notes in section 2 (starting in measure 25) are now replaced by the similarly sounding, but significantly less aggressive fluctuating 8<sup>th</sup> notes in the violins. Other such sections like the mercurial countermelody in measures 13 and 14 are simply turned down in volume. Most fans will barely notice these changes, especially considering the previous version of the game came out 14 years earlier. However, they do succeed in making the track slightly less 'violent', corresponding with the changes to the rival, who is now also a lot less abrasive.

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<sup>117</sup> Pokeli, "Pokémon Let's Go Pikachu & Eevee : Champion Battle Music (HQ)," YouTube Video, 2:59, November 21, 2018, [https://youtu.be/Gsvjir\\_z5lg](https://youtu.be/Gsvjir_z5lg).

<sup>118</sup> Motomiya, "Interview with Shota Kageyama," translation my own, 56.

<sup>119</sup> Motomiya, "Interview with Junichi Masuda," translation my own, 54.

Table 8: Musical transformations in Pokémon Let's Go's Champion theme

Transformations	Champion theme – Pokémon Let's Go Pikachu/Eevee
Quantitative	None
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rock-like orchestration with higher quality samples</li> </ul>
Augmentative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard rock drums</li> <li>• Small melodic and harmonic additions</li> </ul>
Revisionary	Decreased sense of danger by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using less aggressive instruments</li> <li>• Turning down agitative sections</li> <li>• Altering material directly</li> </ul>

Even though the Champion theme is Kageyama's favourite, he kept his update fairly mild. Like many fan-arrangers who try to create authentically sounding updated music, Kageyama did not want to over-arrange Masuda's work.

“One thing I'm paying attention to when I'm involved in the production of music for Pokémon, is that I try not to put too much of my own ego into it. The most important thing is to follow the Pokémon sound that my seniors including Masuda have built.”<sup>120</sup>

To Kageyama, the process of updating music is an emotional effort. In 2014, he left the company after having worked there for six and a half years to pursue independent work. His arranging of the Let's Go games was both a return to his old workplace and coworkers, and a return to the old Pokémon games he holds dear. One could say that updated music like this is conceived through the nostalgic interplay between the original composer, the arranger and their fans. In his final nostalgic message in the liner booklet he writes:

“When it was announced that I would be in charge of arranging this work, I received many messages from fans from Japan and all around the world. Once again, I felt the passionate feelings for the original music of Pokémon Red, Green, Blue and Pikachu. Rather than my own arrangement, you could say it's ‘an arrangement shaped by everyone's feelings’... And so, I would be happy if you could all bask in the memories, while reminiscing about your adventures in the Kanto region.”<sup>121</sup>

### Fanmade versions

The Champion theme seems to be considerably more popular among the fans as material to remaster. Once again, I will focus on two of them. Up first is user Bliitzit's rendition of what the Let's Go version of the Champion theme *could* be.<sup>122</sup> Posted a few months before the official release of the games, it is essentially a fan trying to predict or ‘preproduce’ Kageyama's arrangement. At the time, plenty of information including musical excerpts and interviews concerning Game Freak's approach to Let's Go's updated music was available. Bliitzit seems to have read up on some of this information, because their update contains some elements that correspond with Kageyama's strategy, such as using only material

<sup>120</sup> Motomiya, “Interview with Shota Kageyama,” translation my own, 57-58.

<sup>121</sup> Motomiya, “Interview with Shota Kageyama,” translation my own, 58.

<sup>122</sup> Bliitzit, “Pokémon Let's Go, Pikachu! & Let's Go, Eevee! - Champion Blue Battle Theme (Unofficial),” YouTube Video, 5:15, July 18, 2018, <https://youtu.be/Ig2pS6gBye0>.

from the original RBY games and no FRLG material. No new quantitative changes as usual, but there are some very interesting qualitative ones. Many of the trailers for the games feature prominent drums, strings and choir voices, instruments Bliitzit ended up using plenty of as well. While it was a well-informed prediction, Kageyama decided to primarily feature brass and electric guitar instead in his Champion theme, and he did not use choir voices at all. Especially due to the use of strings and synths over brass and distorted guitar, Bliitzit's version turns out less heavy than the official version. Particularly striking is the clearly nostalgic use of square and arbitrary wave synths, which are likely synthesised using Gameboy soundfonts. Much of the bass and the iconic arpeggios are played using these instruments. Although it sounds quite nostalgically pleasing (to me at the very least), official updated music rarely, if ever, uses such anachronistic design at the risk of alienating more modern audiences. Even if official arrangers were to want to, they do not have the same freedom as fan-arrangers.

Similar to Kageyama's Let's Go version, Bliitzit uses very few augmentative transformations. There are sound effects, a few brass parts that feature filler material and of course some small rhythmic additions, but overall it is a very faithful adaptation. Finally, the revisionary transformations. As expected, little of the melodic material was altered, and everything is included. Now for something chronologically illogical. Remember Masuda requested that the heavier, rock-like tracks be made somewhat milder? Kageyama decided to turn down some of the more dissonant, wilder parts and outright removed others. Bliitzit did the exact same thing, turning down the melody in measures 23-24 and the countermelody in 25-31. The liner notes and the interview which vaguely mentions this came out several months after Bliitzit released their update – a striking coincidence, or can fans, composers and arrangers really be this in sync?

Table 9: Musical transformations in Bliitzit's Champion theme

Transformations	Champion theme – Bliitzit pre-production
Quantitative	None
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instrumentation based on hints in trailers</li> <li>• Includes higher quality soundfont synths</li> </ul>
Augmentative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sound effects</li> <li>• Small rhythmic and melodic additions</li> </ul>
Revisionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Softer instrumentation</li> <li>• Decreased agitation using techniques also found in Let's Go version</li> </ul>

The second update I will discuss is considered a *demake*, an alternative type of updated (if we can still call it that) music that is commonly found in fangames. Other than the official remakes, there are many, *many* Pokémon fangames featuring the first generation. Some reuse the existing music, some use entirely different or new music, and some implement their own updated music. Most of these fangames are based on Pokémon FRLG, which are still the most popular Pokémon games around, even almost 20 years after release.<sup>123</sup> Many players follow fanmade rulesets with which to challenge themselves, try to beat the games as quickly as possible in speedruns or play modded games using emulators. Part of the popularity of the games' modding scene is due to the popularity of the GBA. The GBA is technically a 32-bit

<sup>123</sup> These games also have the most available modding tools, which fans use to selectively implement most of the improvements of the later games.

handheld, but its games function like they are 16-bit. Creating 16-bit pixel art graphics and music is manageable even for people with no experience, the GBA sound chip offers some great sound options and programming is significantly easier than for more modern consoles. In layman's terms, the GBA is on the edge of 3D and 2D games. It can offer great 2D graphics and 16-bit sound, which tend to hold up better over time than the modern alternatives. Because of this, retro fanmade music such as chiptune frequently makes use of the sounds of the GBA and its console equivalent, the SNES.

The Pokémon fangames which are designed to be improvements of the original rarely, if ever, update the original music.<sup>124</sup> Official music from the other games is frequently offered as an option, if the technology allows for it. Occasionally, fans create musical demakes for their fangames, which are essentially downgraded versions of newer music.<sup>125</sup> Trying to play newer music on older hardware directly is often impossible; how can the GB play a GBA track with six parts if it only allows for four? The obvious answer is: by trimming it down, either by straight-up removing two parts, or by embedding them in the other parts. A classical arrangement parallel to the VGM demake would be a *reduction*. Reductions such as piano reductions of orchestral pieces extract the most important material from a piece with more parts into a vertically smaller version, making it more accessible to be used for practice, analysis and even occasionally for listening pleasure.

Pokeli's 8-bit version of the Champion theme is such a demake.<sup>126</sup> However, it is both a demake and a remake in the sense that it is an 8-bit version (GBC) of a 16-bit track (GBA) that is originally based on a 4-bit track (GB). Although it sounds rather convoluted and like something only those at the highest intensity tiers of fanship would try to create, it is in this case relatively easy to explain. Because the GB and GBC use the same sound chip, this demake is essentially a reversion of the FRLG version to its original sound. So, new material – old sound. Because the track is labelled as a demake, I choose to analyse it based on its direct hypotext, the FRLG version, but using the RBY version as the original is also an option. Let us start with quantitative transformations. As we often see in fanmade music, especially on YouTube, the music is looped several times. However, starting from the third go-around, a noise generator is added as percussion. This is similar to the 'let's stay authentic first, then expand later'-strategy, Kageyama often uses in his round-two updates in the Let's Go games. The percussion simply covers the already existing drums in the FRLG version, and so it does not necessarily add any original material. It is likely considered a matter of taste; the noise generator can be somewhat oppressive, which may not be up everyone's alley. Qualitative and augmentative transformations are relatively straightforward this time. Pokeli is using the GBC soundfonts befitting the style they are trying to emulate. There are no augmentative changes at all, as the many additions made in the FRLG version are already difficult enough to include. Because there is so much material, Pokeli had to make decisions as to what and what not to include. Most of the newly included material is harmonic, rather than melodic.

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<sup>124</sup> Standalone fangames often use their own original music or that of other fans, occasionally even mimicking the style of the game it is based on.

<sup>125</sup> Blender Man, "Pokémon Crystal Clear OST," YouTube Video Playlist, [https://youtu.be/3f6W7gy9k9w&list=PLrtFt\\_pDv2HCG2G2SVKkE2XZsY5fdOrpI](https://youtu.be/3f6W7gy9k9w&list=PLrtFt_pDv2HCG2G2SVKkE2XZsY5fdOrpI).

This is a playlist of the demade music for the fangame Pokémon Crystal Clear, which includes a variety of 8-bit versions of 16/32/64-bit music.

<sup>126</sup> Pokeli, "Pokémon FireRed & LeafGreen - Kanto Champion [8bit]," YouTube Video, 5:00, April 26, 2016, <https://youtu.be/begSijf2w9o>.



For example, many harmonic perfect fifths are incorporated, as well as many of the arpeggios that were not present in the original such as those in section 3. As a result of all of the changes, the demake version sounds fuller than the original like the FRLG version, without using the instrumentation afforded by the improved sound chip. Well then, why did Masuda not just do this when he composed the Champion theme in the first place? The answer is simple: he could not. Although this demake sounds like something that could come out of a GBC, it would be impossible for it to play it.<sup>127</sup> Pokeli's version uses at least 3-4 square waves alongside the usual wave and noise channels. If only the GBC would have had access to more channels – imagine what could have been.

Table 10: Musical transformations in Pokeli's Champion theme, as compared to the original and its first official update

Transformations	<i>Kanto Champion [8bit] – Pokeli</i> Compared to FRLG	<i>Kanto Champion [8bit] – Pokeli</i> Compared to RBY
Quantitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percussion in later loops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percussion in later loops</li> </ul>
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GBC instead of GBA soundfonts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Added at least one channel</li> </ul>
Augmentative	<b>None</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New material from FRLG version</li> </ul>
Revisionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Exclusion' of some new material</li> </ul>	<b>None</b>

## Reception

As somewhat expected, the Pallet Town theme blows the Champion theme out of the park in terms of nostalgic reception. Using the same comment analysis, I found significantly fewer nostalgic comments. The most nostalgic videos were the official RBY and FRLG tracks, with 19% and 15% nostalgia rates respectively. The other tracks all came in below 10%. Since there are fewer nostalgic comments around, the fans discuss the different creative choices of the arrangers extensively. They call out specific elements they feel are unfaithful adaptations (read: mistakes) in the arrangement, including some things I discussed earlier such as the removal of some of the chromatic embellishments.

I like how the section at 0:58 has staccato because it sounds like a break in the fight where they're just really enjoying their passion of battling. I really miss that in a lot of the remixes. @lynnny149

Yup, legato to staccato. A pretty intelligent demonstration of this little sound chip as an expressive musical instrument, and the remakes completely skip that. @thepulseman7154<sup>128</sup>

The busy arrangement in the FRLG version is a particularly divisive subject. While some enjoyed the nerve-wracking anxiety, others find it an over-arrangement, an opinion I did not find regarding the Pallet Town theme.

Am I the only one who thinks this version is better than the gba one? The gba one is too noisy while this one was more quiet but each note hit harder and the silence in between each note was filled with this tension that wasn't replicated with the gba version. It's amazing @firesnakex8

<sup>127</sup> An enhanced emulator might be able to offer the required affordances, but the original technology could not.

<sup>128</sup> Pokeli, "Pokémon Red, Blue & Yellow - Champion Battle Music (HQ)," comment section.

Always like this one better. There's this one run of arpeggios that sounds great in this but gets absolutely butchered by weird midi guitar in the remake @thewerebear1<sup>129</sup>

What the fans can seem to agree on however, is that they all hate the Let's Go games and in fact, most of the more recent games. Although many of the older fans do consider themselves a major part of the audience, they are not considered as such by the franchise holders. As a result, many fans complain about Nintendo being better in the past, or that they're not making "awesome tracks like this" as much anymore.<sup>130</sup> Luckily for Kageyama, his work on the music for the Let's Go games seems to be an exception and widely appreciated.

Although significant effort was put into making these updated versions of the Champion theme nostalgically pleasing to the fans, the reception is wildly different from that of the Pallet Town theme. There are several things to consider here. The Pallet Town theme is one of the most nostalgic themes I at least could think of, because of its relevance in the franchise and the games specifically. The Champion theme does tick many of these boxes as well, being highly memorable and extremely relevant in the franchise through its many adaptations. There are two primary differences between the two themes. Firstly, the Pallet Town theme is closely connected to concepts like 'home', 'beginning' and 'adventure', which seem to play a large role in experiencing nostalgia. Secondly, the Pallet Town theme is a slow, timid and relaxing track as opposed to the heartbeat-raising Champion theme. Although this greatly affected the number of nostalgic fans in the comments, there is also a noticeable difference in the type of nostalgia they seem to experience. Whereas the Pallet Town fans were often melancholic in their nostalgia, the Champion theme fans seem to experience nostalgia more positively. Little to no comments are melancholic or even somewhat negative in general. While this could be a result of the nostalgia of the track, people are also drawn to different types of music depending on their state of mind. It is possible that a larger number of fans are wallowing in the mire even before deciding to listen to the Pallet Town theme. Perhaps the second case study might provide some answers.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Pokeli, "Pokémon FireRed & LeafGreen - Champion Rival Battle Music (HQ)," comment section.



## Chapter 4: Case study 2: Final Fantasy VI's mini-opera

Among western roleplaying games the king may be the classic tabletop game *Dungeons & Dragons*, but in the east the most iconic franchise is Square Enix' *Final Fantasy*. Final Fantasy is the second-highest grossing roleplaying franchise worldwide (only behind Pokémon) and consists of dozens of games across just about every console released since the late 80s. Alongside its brother in *Dragon Quest*, it is one of the most influential series in Japanese RPGs. Their gameplay elements, music and character tropes are so particular that practically every Japanese RPG is influenced by these two, as well as many western RPGs that try to emulate them. They are also one of the main reasons, *Final Fantasy IV (1991)* (FFIV) in particular, that Japanese games have grown so popular in the west. Many people were introduced to fantasy roleplaying games through FFIV, one of the first games to feature fixed characters and a long, detailed story as opposed to the common 'choose your own adventure' games. This also marks the most important difference between the audience of this case study and the previous one. Compared to the Pokémon franchise which is primarily designed for a younger audience, Final Fantasy is text-heavy, challenging and generally more mature. This may play a role in the fans' nostalgic reception, something I will discuss at the end of the chapter.

As I noted earlier in chapter 1, the Final Fantasy franchise is typified by its few recurring elements, which show up in both the mainline games and the many spin-offs. Many of the company's key individuals such as graphic designer Tetsuya Nomura, game director Yoshinori Kitase and composer Nobuo Uematsu have been with the company for decades, allowing them to grow a large fanbase even though the games have changed much over time. Similar to the Pokémon franchise, nostalgia plays a large role in Square Enix's business strategy regarding Final Fantasy. Games are frequently updated and many of the spin-off games feature characters and other material from several different instalments. Compared to the Pokémon franchise, which focuses predominantly on nostalgia surrounding their characters and monsters, music plays a much larger role in the Final Fantasy franchise. Games frequently feature music from older games, in all sorts of arrangements. The Massive Multiplayer Online RPG *Final Fantasy XIV (2010)* has a similarly massive soundtrack of almost 700 tracks, many of which are arrangements of existing music. There are also many types of Final Fantasy musical paratexts, such as a variety of albums, concerts and sheet music. The franchise even has their own rhythm game series starting with *Final Fantasy Theatrhythm (2012)*, in which the player can perform nostalgia-inducing tracks from almost every game in the series. The primary force behind all of this is Final Fantasy's longtime composer Nobuo Uematsu, who has worked on almost all of the music in the franchise. Square Enix can attribute a large part of their success to Uematsu and so he is generally given complete freedom and authority in any matters related to music. Over the years, Uematsu has interacted with the fans through many interviews, blogs, social media, and by attending and even by performing concerts. Due to his longstanding position in the franchise, Uematsu shares his nostalgia quite frequently. Like his fans, he too finds himself feeling nostalgic when he relives some of the music he composed decades ago.

"Oh right, I played Theatrhythm Final Fantasy for the first time today. Everyone, this is not bad! Remembering this and that from the past 20 years brought a tear to my eye. FF music fans will definitely want to play it. So, why don't we cry together?"<sup>131</sup>

Out of all of the mainline instalments, numbers IV, VI and VII likely have the most nostalgic audiences. FFIV is the most obvious candidate for this case study, considering its importance in videogame history and the fact that the game has been ported, remastered and remade in over a dozen versions. *Final Fantasy VII (1997)* is another viable option, as it is the first 3D game and still immensely popular. Nevertheless, I have instead decided to focus on *Final Fantasy VI (1994)*. Although it may not have the same historical sway as the other two games, it is generally considered the best game in the franchise (alongside FFVII) and extremely influential. The main reason however, is that it features the most interesting musical material. After all, this is a thesis primarily about music. I will include some of the material from the other games in the reception section, which can provide us with some valuable comparisons.

### Final Fantasy VI's *Maria and Draco*

Although I initially intended to focus on Final Fantasy IV because of its nostalgic position in the RPG community, I could not pass up the opportunity to include Final Fantasy VI's mini-opera, the primary impetus behind this case study. Operatic, or rather classically inspired vocal music, has been progressively increasing in popularity in VGM. However, actual *operas* or opera scenes are rare. They are not only difficult to compose, but they also require a libretto, not to mention the many other facets of opera such as costumes and scenery. Nevertheless, there are a few developers that have taken up the glove and produced opera scenes, such as the aria in *Parasite Eve (1998)*. However, there is only a single game that I know of that features an actual opera, not just a single aria or otherwise. That is of course FFVI's *Maria and Draco*. The opera is divided into 4 parts which function together as a single-act opera. It starts with an *Overture*, followed by the *Aria di Mezzo Carattere*, the *Wedding Waltz – Duel* and finally the *Grand Finale*. In about 10 to 20 minutes, we have run through what is essentially an entire, albeit compressed, opera. In the game the opera is portrayed on stage in a concert hall, a composite of the many styles of western opera houses through the ages, like a more medieval, yet simultaneously more Romantic version of Milan's baroque-era Teatro Alla Scala. The opera includes opera singers, dancers, scenery, costumes, orchestra, conductor, impresario and audience, all befitting the style and decorum of grand opera. The change of setting is especially striking considering the rest of the game features predominantly retro-futuristic steampunk aesthetics.

FFVI was originally released in 1994 on the Super Famicom, also known as the SNES in the west. It was later ported to the Sony Playstation, Nintendo Game Boy Advance and others. Last year, in 2022, the game was remastered in *Final Fantasy VI Pixel Remaster (2022)*, alongside the first 5 instalments. There are no other updated versions of the FFVI game, but there are a plethora of official paratexts that might be considered updated versions. These paratexts will serve as suitable examples to ask whether or not

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<sup>131</sup> Nobuo Uematsu (@hikkaripikkari), February 14, 2012, translation my own, <https://twitter.com/hikkaripikkari/status/169451015580561409/>.

the same model of updated music can be applied and if we can even consider such paratexts updated versions.

In this section, I start by analysing *Maria and Draco* in its original form and the minute changes in its ports. Next, I tackle the Pixel Remaster and its version of the opera, which includes changes to not only the music, but also the ‘cinematography’ surrounding the scene. As there is no third in-game version of the opera I examine a few official paratexts instead, focusing on their intertextual relationship to the hypertext and thus, the concept of updated music as a whole. In the second section, I once again select a few fanmade paratexts to analyse. Finally, I discuss reception of all of the versions I have discussed until then. Because the opera is significantly larger than the two themes in case study 1, I will be focusing less on the most specific of details and more so on the opera’s vocal parts.

## The original opera

We will start with the original SNES version of the opera for several reasons. The first being that it is the original version and the hardware the music was composed for. Secondly, even though it might be easier to continue working with GBA music as I have before, the 3 Final Fantasy games on GBA use a custom-made sound engine, supposedly made to be able to accurately port SNES music to the GBA. This custom engine makes it extremely difficult to analyse raw sound data without in turn writing custom software to do so. Luckily, there are some tools available for the SNES, which is still a popular console to modders even if it does not have as thriving of a community as the GBA, which is even the preferred instrument of many chiptune live performers.<sup>132</sup> Thirdly, although the entire soundtrack was ported as faithfully as possible at the time from the SNES to the GBA, the sound quality is significantly lower. One fan hated it so much they decided to make their own ‘sound restoration patch’, which I will return to in the fan section of this case study.

Close to halfway through the game, you (the player) find yourself in an opera house. In the hall, which looks more like a medieval castle than an opera house, you meet the opera house’s impresario. In the background, you hear one of those typically out-of-tune old upright pianos you can find in bars. The pianist is playing ragtime, a genre intended to bridge low- and highbrow culture, not unlike the videogame opera you are about to hear. The player initially visits the opera house to draw out and contact a man named Setzer who will supposedly kidnap the prima donna during the performance. Celes, one of the characters in the player’s group, just so happens to be the spitting image of Maria, and thus she is tasked with the lead role of the titular character in order to protect the prima donna from the kidnapping. To ensure her success as a singer, Celes (and with her, the player) needs to quickly memorise her lines in the backroom. Although they do not have direct control over the performance, the player does interact with it, enhancing the immersion according to van Elferen’s ALI model. If the player fails to remember the lines or fumbles any of the other actions required to perform the opera properly, they will be forced to start all over again. Cheng connects this demand for compliance to the authority of the score.<sup>133</sup> This is especially salient to music students who have often had similar experiences, the episodic memory of

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<sup>132</sup> McAlpine, *Bits and Pieces : A History of Chiptunes*, 171-204.

<sup>133</sup> Cheng, *Sound Play: Video Games and the Musical Imagination*, 74.

which may further enhance their emotions.<sup>134</sup> The rest of the player's merry band is primarily part of the audience and will also need to perform several tasks throughout the opera.

Draco and Maria's original libretto was written by Yoshinori Kitase, one of the game's directors. Before writing the libretto, Kitase had no experience with opera. He intended to watch one before writing the scene, but ended up having to write from "pure imagination."<sup>135</sup> His story is a classic love triangle, like Verdi's *Aida* or Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, which is as common in opera as it is in many other popular media. The western princess Maria is in love with Draco, 'the hero of the west'. Sadly, the west loses the war to the east and as a result, Maria is now engaged with the eastern prince Ralse. In order to get his soon-to-be-wed beloved back, Draco attempts one last assault on Ralse's armies. In an interview to promote the Pixel Remaster, Uematsu divulges some details about Kitase's inspirations, noting that the libretto was in fact a love letter. Although Kitase attempts to deflect Uematsu's embarrassing comments, he eventually has to concede as he did end up marrying the very woman the love letter was directed at. Clearly, the opera holds great meaning to him, even though he said he was "young to even think it [love] would be like this." When Kitase finally had the opportunity to see the opera in concert in 2011, he said it was an "extremely emotional" experience.<sup>136</sup>

Instead of the usual looping of tracks in VGM, half of the opera is not looped. The Waltz and Grand Finale are looped within certain limitations, but the Overture and Aria are not. The opera essentially combines looped orchestral parts and not-looped vocal parts, with the Wedding Waltz – Duel containing both types. It is a lengthy piece to update and analyse compared to for instance the 16-measure Pallet Town theme, which is why I will be focusing on the vocal parts. Like in historical opera culture, the aria is by far the most popular part of the opera and often extracted from its original context to be performed separately. In official productions however, the opera is kept mostly intact. That obviously includes the different versions of the game, but also the recordings and live performances. They usually feature the three singers (Draco: bass; Ralse: tenor; and Maria: mezzo-soprano) and even the speaker. When I said the opera was kept intact, that was twofold. The parts of the opera that are in the game are included, but there are also official versions of the *complete* opera. I will return to that topic later.

Maria's part is a mezzo-soprano, which is fairly uncommon to use as a lead role in operatic music. Instead, sopranos are usually used for the lead, while mezzo-sopranos take the supporting roles of mothers, sisters, friends and the sort. It may have been a conscious choice to use a slightly more accessible voice type because of the type of audience, or simply because higher ranges tend to be problematic on older technology. However, it is also a naturally fitting option when all other roles are male. Verdi's *Attila* for instance features a single female role in Odabella alongside a variety of male voices. Although Odabella is a soprano role, it is preferable to cast a lyric soprano with solid lower range so she can cover both the soprano and mezzo registers. Using a bass for the lead 'hero' male role is similarly irregular in opera. The roles are usually the other way around: a hero tenor and a villain bass. One could say Uematsu simply does not know the *conventions* of opera, but considering his audience

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<sup>134</sup> Rone, "A Player's Guide to the Psychology of Nostalgia and Videogame Music", 34.

<sup>135</sup> Joe Juba, "The Best Of An Era: Looking Back On Final Fantasy VI After 25 Years," *GameInformer*, April 2, 2019, article on GameInformer interview with Yoshinori Kitase, 2014, <https://www.gameinformer.com/2019/04/02/the-best-of-an-era-looking-back-on-final-fantasy-vi-after-25-years>.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

there is no need for him to follow any such conventions, regardless of his knowledge of opera conventions. Games were and still are generally considered ‘lowbrow’ media, as opposed to the quintessentially ‘highbrow’ art that is opera. For many players, this was their first and perhaps only interaction with opera. Although the very nature of games is to play with the rules of the game and VGM composers tend to face many such challenges, at least they are not forced to follow the burdensome ruleset of centuries of western classical music as well. The distribution of voice types was notably changed in some of the official arrangements, which I will discuss later.

### Overture



Figure 9: The stage and orchestra at the start of Final Fantasy VI's (SNES) Overture (left) and Draco's solo (right)

The opera starts with the overture, which starts playing after a fade-to-black and several seconds before the screen finally shows the stage. During the overture, the stage is set by the speaker, who introduces the characters and the story of a classic east versus west war, while the conductor and orchestra animatedly perform their parts. The conductor waves around frantically, while the string-heavy orchestra follows his lead perfectly, as one would expect from a digital orchestra. The animation is significantly faster than the actual speed of the piece, but let's not let that ruin the immersion. The overture starts off with a grand entrée on Bm, focusing on the lower strings and percussion which will be leading the overture. After the ending of the section, we switch to a solo harp which accompanies the spoken word, captioned introduction by the impresario. As the impresario walks off-stage, the camera pans to the lavish stage, where Draco walks up. After he gets overrun by enemy cavalry, symbolising his defeat in battle, the orchestra quiets down. Draco gets up and starts his solo simultaneously with the orchestra. Although the other synthesised instruments sound relatively similar to their physical counterparts, synthesising an accurate voice, especially the specifics of articulation, was not possible at the time.<sup>137</sup> Regardless, Draco's bass voice is intimately connected to his character on stage, even though it is limited to oh/ah open-vowel phonemes. In between lines he slowly walks across the stage. His mouth opens wide following his voice, befitting not only the open-vowel sounds, but also proper operatic

<sup>137</sup> Fully sampled and replayed sound was an option, but the quality would have been strenuously low because there were heavy limitations to the amount of data used for sound. FFVI is one of the longest games on the console, so any space needed to be highly optimised.



singing technique. In order to really sell the operatic voice, Uematsu emulates a slow but heavy vibrato in all three voices. Draco's text is simple, translated from the original Japanese as: Oh Maria / Oh Maria / Please, hear my voice! / How I long to be with you! The lack of embellishments and accessible range makes it easier for the player to follow Draco and imagine that the ohs and ahs are really the text on screen. The melody and cadence is based on the original Japanese libretto and fits well in the Japanese version. The English translation however, does not fit the cadence or even the number of syllables, making it less contagious.<sup>138</sup> Perhaps it would have been appropriate to keep the original Japanese text, even if players would not be able to understand it. Similar to the use of Italian, this would focus the listener's attention on the music, rather than the text.<sup>139</sup> Interestingly, in Japanese the text is written entirely in hiragana, which means each symbol generally corresponds with one syllable, and thus also one note.<sup>140</sup> This is also commonly seen in karaoke, because it makes it easier for the reader to sing along, providing they already know the melody.

## Overture (Draco's solo) - Final Fantasy VI

Composed by Nobuo Uematsu

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1-6) shows Draco's vocal line in a bass clef with a tempo marking of quarter note = 70. The Viola and Contrabasso parts are shown in bass clef with chords and sustained notes. The second system (measures 7-12) continues the Draco vocal line, with the Viola and Contrabasso parts providing harmonic support. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Figure 10: Score of Draco's solo in Final Fantasy VI's Overture (transcription my own), complete score is available in the appendix

<sup>138</sup> The text was later translated and rewritten again to fit the melody better when it had to be sung by real voices.

<sup>139</sup> In some live performances of the piece, they actually use Italian instead of Japanese, possibly with a similar purpose. The Italian translation is also popular among fan-creators.

<sup>140</sup> All other text in the opera, such as the spoken introduction, are written using the regular style of combining kanji and kana.

*Aria di Mezzo Carattere***Aria di Mezzo Carattere - Final Fantasy VI**

Composed by Nobuo Uematsu

$\text{♩} = 75$

Mezzo-soprano  
Maria (Celes)

Harp

5

Maria

Harp

9

Maria

Harp

13

Maria

Harp



17

Mezzo-soprano  
Maria (Celes)

Horn

Harp

Violins I

Violins II

Violas

Celli

Contrabasses

19

Maria

Hn.

Hrp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Cel.

Cb.

The image displays a musical score for the first 25 measures of Final Fantasy VI's Aria di Mezzo Carattere. The score is presented in two systems. The first system, starting at measure 21, includes staves for Maria (vocal line), Horn (Hn.), Harp (Hrp.), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Cel.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The second system, starting at measure 24, continues the same instrumentation. The harp part is characterized by a continuous, intricate arpeggiated pattern. The vocal line for Maria is a simple, diatonic melody with slight alterations. The string section provides harmonic support with sustained notes and simple rhythmic patterns.

Figure 11: Score of the first 25 measures of Final Fantasy VI's Aria di Mezzo Carattere (transcription my own)

During the short interlude that follows, the player is given one last chance to review Celes' lines, whose pre-performance stress is infectious. After the overture, the Aria di Mezzo Carattere (aria of half-character) begins, while the player controls Celes' words and movement. The voice is introduced by one of Uematsu's favourite instruments in the harp. Celes-as-Maria slowly climbs a large tower, singing about lamenting her lost love Draco. During the aria, the player is asked to select the correct lines. This part as well as the rest of the opera is distinctly time-based. The music continues while Celes is pondering which line she should be singing next, embedding the player in the performance alongside her. For an operatic aria, it is surprisingly simple. The harmony is straightforward: a new triadic chord every measure, except for the dominant seventh at the end. After an 8-measure intro, the 8-measure mostly diatonic melody is sung with slight alterations three times. This melody also becomes her personal theme later in the game. The string section joins during the second stanza, providing mostly reinforcement of the triadic

harmonies and doubling of the main melody. After a short interlude, it is performed another two times before the coda. The repetition makes the melody more memorable, and it even fits in the range of exactly one octave, making it especially contagious. Her English lyrics match up with the melody much better this time as well. So why is the Aria so simple compared to for instance Draco's solo? Why is it more of a *song* than an *aria*? Uematsu is not known for writing particularly simple instrumental tracks, but the Aria is stylistically similar to some of his pop and folk tracks, such as Final Fantasy X's Okinawan folk-inspired *Suteki Da Ne* (Isn't it wonderful?). It is possible Uematsu intentionally made the Aria more accessible considering Celes' background, a topic I will return to in the next section. Either way, this has had the unintentional effect that the aria is also significantly easier to perform by fans, which has contributed to its popularity among fan-performers. Additionally, the fact that the melody, which will later also be used as Celes' theme, is repeated so many times serves to commit it to memory better. This intensifies one of the most moving scenes in the game later, in which Celes is unable to save her sick grandfather from a slow, painful death, causing her to spiral into depression and attempt to commit suicide.



Figure 12: The start of Final Fantasy VI's (SNES) *Aria di Mezzo Carattere* (left) and ending (right)

As was the case for Draco, the player is invited to fill in the gap between Celes' phonemical voice and whatever they deem realistic using nothing but sheer fantasy. Her voice alludes to realism, but it does not come close enough on its own. To use Cheng's poetic words:

To be nostalgic for Celes's voice, in the end, is to play along in a game of virtual longing—virtual, because it's a longing for something that could never really be, for a voice that never even existed in the way it would have us believe.<sup>141</sup>

This makes the aria the perfect example of an idealised memory – a nostalgic experience from long ago that was shaped heavily by youthful fantasy, as imaginary as it was fleeting. Later, I will discuss examples of the fans' imaginary version of Celes' voice corresponds to her updated voices.

<sup>141</sup> William Cheng, *Sound Play: Video Games and the Musical Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 79.

### *Wedding Waltz – Duel and Grand Finale*

The Wedding Waltz – Duel comes after, starting with a waltzing scene with Maria, Ralse and a group of dancers. The waltz is interrupted by Draco, who challenges the prince to a duel for the hand of Maria in a short trio. During this time, the player controls the rest of their group who are trying to climb up the scaffolding in order to protect Celes from the supposed kidnapper. The Duel part of the track is looped, as the player is given 5 minutes to complete their tasks. In the end, the player accidentally interrupts the duel by falling from the scaffolding and knocking out the two men vying for Maria's hand. This forces the team and the remaining performers to ad-lib the ending. What follows is the Grand Finale, an almost comical track which plays as the player fights the recurring comic-relief villain Ultros. While the player is victorious and the opera nevertheless ends on a happy ending, the rest of the story does not. After the fight, Setzer's theme is played as he swoops in and kidnaps Celes. Both of these tracks are very different from the first three parts of the opera, implying they were not intended to be part of it. It is even suggested that the orchestra is performing them, as the performers are still playing their instruments fervently until the screen fades to black. Is the orchestra playing something entirely different ad-lib in order to save the show, were these tracks intended to be part of the opera in some manner, or is this ending simply non-diegetic? Although not entirely conclusive, we will find some answers in the updated versions.

### The same pixels and score, but remastered

The sole official game update of FFVI is the FFVI Pixel Remaster. Several of the other games were fully remade (even in 3D), but the Pixel Remasters focus on authenticity instead, with the motto “Return to the games that started it all!”<sup>142</sup> They are all 2D, as opposed to the remakes, and are specifically designed for players to have a similar experience to the original with a fresh coat of paint. There are some changes to the gameplay and the significantly higher resolution does alter the graphics a bit, but overall, the games have a very similar feel to the original. FFVI is lauded as having some of the best pixel art graphics possible even on modern systems, but as I noted in the Pokémon case study the SNES/GBA had their limitations in terms of sound. In fact, the music is probably what was changed the most out of all of the aspects of game development.

The Pixel Remasters were quite successful, with sales topping 2 million and positive overall reception by fans and critics alike.<sup>143</sup> As was the case in the first case study, several of the original developers, such as Yoshinori Kitase, and most notably the original composer Nobuo Uematsu worked on the remasters. Although the Chrono Cross soundtrack for instance was remastered solely by its original composer, most other updated music is created by multiple composers, which holds true for many current-day original soundtracks as well.<sup>144</sup> The process of composing complete soundtracks tends to rather costly in terms of time and resources, and arranging (in this case, fully orchestrating) such soundtracks is equally so. Whereas many original games tend to be in production for about 3 to 6 years, ports and remasters

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<sup>142</sup> Square Enix, “FINAL FANTASY PIXEL REMASTER,” <https://finalfantasypixelremaster.square-enix-games.com/>.

<sup>143</sup> Sal Romano, “Final Fantasy Pixel Remaster series sales top two million,” May 2, 2023, <https://www.gematsu.com/2023/05/final-fantasy-pixel-remaster-series-sales-top-two-million>.

<sup>144</sup> It has to be noted that very few changes were made to the Chrono Cross soundtrack, making the update significantly easier as opposed to a full remake.

often take significantly less time. In this case, the 6 Pixel Remasters were in production at the same time, and they were released over the short span of 2 years. Additionally, it is often difficult to get the original composers of the especially popular multi-instalment franchises to produce the updated soundtracks. Many of them have gone freelance in order to broaden their horizons and expand their options into different IPs, or they are now in entirely different positions (such as Masuda). Simply put, they are expensive and they have other, more important work to do. Many of them are hired as consultants however, or in the case of the Pixel Remasters as overseers to ensure the work meets their standards. In order to be able to market remasters like these as ‘authentic’, marketing material often mentions the inclusion of the ‘original composer’ or ‘original graphics artist’ in the development process. In the case of household names such as Uematsu, you might even find their name on the cover. In my anecdotal experience, the original composer is by far the most commonly mentioned individual out of all people associated with development. Game designers, programmers, graphics artists, writers, none of them compare to the nostalgic popularity of the composer.

The FFVI Pixel Remaster is, like all Pixel Remasters, very faithful to the original material. Applying the model of updated music to all aspects of the remasters, they consist almost entirely of qualitative transformations and very few augmentative and revisionary ones. The entire soundtrack is recorded using live instruments in addition to the Japan Century Symphony Orchestra. A dozen arrangers and another dozen sound engineers worked on the project, making it a humungous effort compared to the updated music found in for instance the Pokémon franchise or fanmade material. As the opera is the centrepiece of the FFVI soundtrack and the entire game, remastering it properly will have required even more effort. Although there are two other lengthy compositions of 17 and even 22 minutes on the FFVI soundtrack, the opera features 3 different opera singers in 7 languages, resulting in a total of 21 opera singers from many different countries, speaking different languages. I will focus on the original Japanese version and the English version, which is the most important version considering the series’ international audience.<sup>145</sup>

Table 11: Musical transformations in Final Fantasy VI Pixel Remaster's Draco and Maria

Transformations	<i>Draco and Maria</i> – Final Fantasy VI Pixel Remaster
Quantitative	None
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replaced synthesised instruments with real instruments</li> <li>• Reinforced parts monophonically within orchestra section</li> <li>• Replaced synthesised voices with real voices</li> </ul>
Augmentative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New harp material in the Overture</li> <li>• New percussion and woodwind material that was not possible before</li> </ul>
Revisionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replaced synthesised voices with real voices</li> <li>• Celes is now just a ‘decent’ singer</li> <li>• Swapped Ralse and Draco’s voice types</li> <li>• Changed the libretto</li> <li>• Moved some string parts to woodwinds</li> <li>• More dynamic</li> </ul>

<sup>145</sup> The Italian version is especially popular among fans due to the language’s intimate connection with opera.

The word ‘remaster’ tends to signify a supposed authenticity, which boils down to it having few augmentative and revisionary transformations. Uematsu’s original compositions tend to be highly melodic and in the case of FFVI especially, he made full use of his technological affordances to create lush atmospheres. Although such things have never stopped arrangers from going even deeper if they wanted, the Pixel Remaster soundtrack stays close to the original. Those tracks that are especially treasured among fans are changed fairly little, but there are some more significant augmentative transformations in some of the simpler, less important tracks. *Maria and Draco* falls in the former category. There is little new material, nor is the opera expanded upon in quantitative transformations. All of the pre-existing material is faithfully included, with little to no changes. That means that the update is predominantly qualitative, meeting the expectations of a remaster. The original piece was composed using synthesised instruments that relatively closely mirror their real-life counterparts. Their parts are faithfully transferred to the in-studio instruments and occasionally enhanced monophonically using instruments from the same section of the orchestra. Uematsu makes full use of the dynamics of the orchestra, ranging from pianississimo to fortississimo in his score, something he was not afforded to do in much of his early work.<sup>146</sup> Although these changes are designed to create a fuller, more orchestral sound, they are not excessively so, at least compared to the Distant Worlds versions that are on the docket after this.

The few augmentative transformations are quite subtle, in particular because none of them alter existing parts. The harp in the Overture enters in the 31<sup>st</sup> measure, and leaves 16 measures later in the original. In the PR the harp sticks around until the 68<sup>th</sup> measure, accompanying Draco until the end of his part with some new, non-melodic material. This way, both Maria and Draco have their parts supported by Uematsu’s iconic harp. The Aria is mostly untouched except for the interlude, which now includes percussion and new woodwind material in the upper ranges. This draws the attention away from the harp, which has been turned down in volume significantly and gets drowned out by the larger orchestra of the PR. The Duel also features some small changes, including once again some new material in the percussion and woodwinds, which were used sparingly in the original. It is interesting to note that the latter two transformations would have been impossible on the original hardware, as the maximum number of parts had already been reached and percussion was often the first to go. So even if Uematsu had these changes in mind before, he was unable to include them. The first change however, would have been easily implemented. It would interest me greatly to hear Uematsu’s reasoning behind such changes; would he have for instance made the same change if he were to update his score on the original console?

This leaves the vocal parts. The synthesised voices were the furthest away from being real, yet they were also the most diegetic and closely connected to their pixelated characters. Replacing the original version’s viola with a studio performer’s viola is definitely noticeable, but the synthesised SNES instruments from 1994 were close enough to the real thing, only a small step away.<sup>147</sup> Replacing the synthesised voices however, is a different situation entirely. A similarly small step would mean using higher quality but still phonemical synthesised voices, perhaps even generated using modern-day AI technology. This however would be incongruent with the fully orchestral instrumentals. Uematsu semi-jokingly offered the idea

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<sup>146</sup> The best example of this is in the Duel, where you can find swift pp to ff changes within a single measure.

<sup>147</sup> Compare that to for instance the GB’s sounds from the first case study, in which some of the synths ‘could be interpreted as’ string instruments, but no more.



to simply use opera singers to his producers, and “why not in several languages while we’re at it?”<sup>148</sup> They had already used several opera singers in their live concerts and even in Uematsu’s *The Black Mages*. Uematsu was surprised his idea was taken so seriously; he was given more authority and granted more affordances than he had expected.

Kitase: “A producer came to me and asked ‘Uematsu requested this, what should I do?’”

[Uematsu laughs]

Kitase (laughingly): “So I replied ‘You should listen to him and do everything he says.’”

Uematsu (jokingly): “Don’t try and stop me!”<sup>149</sup>

The libretto was once again retranslated, this time in multiple languages and with its performance in mind. In English and the original Japanese each syllable is sung to a specific note as intended, albeit now without the player-as-performer hiragana text for the latter. However, they had to make a few compromises to make things work in the other versions. Sadly, this came at the expense of the original’s strong syllabic articulation by the characters. As a result, the voices now feel less closely connected to their characters, making them feel less real. Nevertheless, they did manage to perform the piece in 7 languages, something Uematsu greatly appreciated. Both he and his librettist Kitase had always been especially fond of their opera and their emotional investment shows.

“From a total of 7 languages: Japanese, English, Spanish, Italian, German, French, & Korean, I was sent good data. No matter what language it was, even when I couldn’t understand it, I still couldn’t help overflowing with tears. The world has around 7.7 billion people, I don’t know the exact number, and thinking about the many people all around the world who share the same feelings on a single entertainment work really made the tears come out.”<sup>150</sup>

Draco performs his part in the overture with ample vibrato, just like his synthesised counterpart. I would have considered his original part a bass role, but the Pixel Remaster uses baritones for most languages instead. Ralse’s part, which was originally a tenor, is now filled by either a bass or also a baritone. In essence, the two have swapped, which also happens in several of the live versions. Draco’s solo is entirely unchanged and still in a bass/baritone range, and Ralse’s short part is also unchanged. However, during the Wedding Waltz – Duel when the three singers perform together, Draco’s entire part is shifted up a perfect octave, placing it higher than Ralse and outside of the original bass range. By comparison, Ralse’s untouched part now sounds significantly lower. This is further emphasised in the Japanese version by the use of a distinctly bass singer, a stark difference from the original’s almost heroic tenor. This is one of the only true revisionary transformations in the entire opera. Perhaps Uematsu too preferred the standardised roles of opera over his original idea. This is not the first time the roles are reversed; the octavated Draco can originally be found in the Distant Worlds and Black Mages versions I will discuss in the next section.

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<sup>148</sup> SQUARE ENIX, “[FFVI] New Opera Theatre [Pixel Remastered],” YouTube Video, 9:32, February 23, 2022, translation my own, <https://youtu.be/VEmCUph3XNw>, 3:00-3:30.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 3:30-3:40.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 4:00-4:50.



Table 12: Voice classification of the three operatic singers in *Draco and Maria*

	<i>Original</i>	<i>Pixel Remaster</i>
<i>Maria</i>	mezzo-soprano	(mezzo-) soprano
<i>Draco</i>	bass	baritone/tenor
<i>Ralse</i>	(heroic) tenor	bass

Maria's part stands out from the other two. Whereas both Draco and Ralse perform with grand operatic voices and heavy vibrato, Maria does neither.<sup>151</sup> Although her original 'performance' was just as operatic as her male counterparts, she sounds nothing like them in the Pixel Remaster. This is especially noticeable in the trio at the end of the waltz. Production further leans into this idea by having singer-songwriters sing Maria's part as opposed to the opera singers who perform the male roles. In a recent interview, Uematsu says that this was in fact intentional.

"If [Celes] could actually sing real opera, that would be a lie," Uematsu explains [...] "So we had the fixation to intentionally choose someone whose vocals didn't seem like an opera singer, but more like a musical singer."<sup>152</sup>

Whereas the other performers are supposed to be opera singers, Celes is *not* a singer, but an army general who just so happens to be on stage. If Uematsu had written a realistic operatic aria, it would have been impossible to have Celes perform it accurately. This creative revision is especially interesting because it moves past simply revising existing musical material. It also takes into consideration the game, its characters and its setting. It is an attempt at realism, aimed to improve immersion in the game's fantasy world. In doing so, it is as much an update to the game's soundtrack as it is an update to the game as a whole. Perhaps only a few particularly observant fans will consider Uematsu's intentions, but to even consider such an imaginative, distinct change almost 30 years after the game's release goes to show how truly invested Uematsu and Kitase are.

It is interesting to note that the opera scene was also changed from a cinematographical perspective. The stage is still similar to the original, but its 2D nature is creatively opened up using 2D-3D technology Square Enix recently developed for some of their other games. At certain intervals, the camera angle switches from the straight-on 2D angle to a slightly skewed 30-45°, giving it a sense of 3D. The camera also follows Maria around as she climbs the suddenly massive tower. Additionally, there is now more stage-like lighting, such as the new spotlights focusing on the performers. All in all, this not only makes the stage seem grander, but it also accentuates the fact that it is in fact a *staged performance*, further humanising its performers. Kitase mentions that they decided on these changes specifically with the music in mind.

Kitase: "Well, like I said, the concept [for the Pixel Remasters] was to properly recreate the original's pixel art, but when it comes to the opera, we did keep the feel of the original intact, but

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<sup>151</sup> This specific change only holds true for the Japanese and English versions of the Aria, which are presumably the ones given the most attention and vocal direction. The other versions, the German one especially, contain heavy vibrato.

<sup>152</sup>

we gave the location, the stage itself a bit of a 3D feel. Because, you know, if the music is improved that much, the visuals would end up lagging behind..."

Uematsu: "There it is, competitive as always"

[...]

Kitase: "So yes, when it comes to the visuals, we feel like we really struck a balance between bringing it back into a modern age while keeping that old school feeling."<sup>153</sup>

Kitase considers Uematsu's updating of the music a significant improvement, which did not align with the improvements they had initially made to the graphics. Depending on the material, there may be more room for improvement without sacrificing authenticity in certain aspects of the game than others. FFVI's pixel art had already reached the pinnacle of what can be done in 16-bit pixel art according to many, even in 1994, and so Kitase decided on some more creative changes instead. Even though Uematsu largely focused on qualitative transformations like Kitase, he also made some more impactful changes, such as the revision of the voices. In the end, it is a matter of choice. Perhaps a different composer might have decided *not* to use real voices, and instead simply higher quality synthesised voices. In turn, the director might have decided *not* to change the camera angles in order to compete with the updated music. In multimedia production, all aspects of the work need to be harmoniously brought together, and the updating of such works can be an especially delicate process.




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<sup>153</sup> SQUARE ENIX, "[FFVI] New Opera Theatre [Pixel Remastered]," 6:30-7:20, transcribed and translated by my friend Adrie.

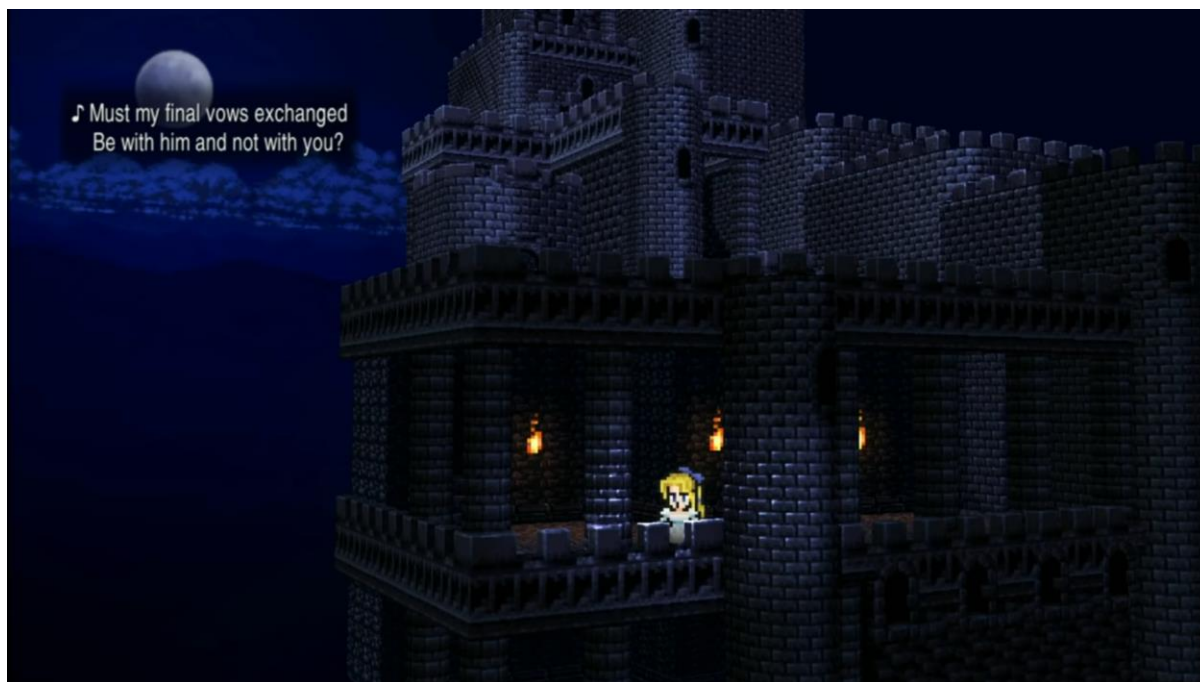


Figure 13: Scenes from *Final Fantasy VI Pixel Remaster's* *Draco and Maria, Overture* (previous page) and *Aria di Mezzo Carattere* (this page)

## Official paratexts

Square Enix releases many different paratextual versions of their music, in albums and also commonly in a live concert format. As for the FFVI albums, there is an official soundtrack, a remastered version of that soundtrack, the *Grand Finale* album I mentioned in chapter 2, and a *Piano Collections* album. The remastered version boasts slightly higher quality, but the difference is hardly noticeable. The *Piano Collections* are albums specifically arranged for piano, so they do not fit our criteria of updated music. That leaves the *Grand Finale* album, named after Draco and Maria's final track *Grand Finale*, which was as the title implied intended to be a grand update to the original. I noted earlier that Uematsu was extremely dissatisfied with the end result, partly because he was not as involved in its production as he would have liked. Although the opera is not included in its entirety, the *Aria di Mezzo Carattere* is.<sup>154</sup> The entire *Grand Finale* album is stylistically very different from its original material. There are many quantitative and augmentative transformations, and heavy revisions to the atmosphere. The aria is no different in this; starting from the very beginning the track is unrecognisable. The opening is composed of entirely new material, and not based on for example the overture. The harp is replaced by a harpsichord, giving the aria, like many other tracks on the album, a distinctly baroque sound. It is still highly arpeggiated, but that is where the similarities between the two instruments end. In fact, that is where the similarities between the two versions end. The mezzo-soprano part is still the same as it is in every version of the aria, but that is the *only* part that remains of the original.<sup>155</sup> Yes, there is still an almost complete string section, but they play entirely new material. Other than the mezzo melody, the

<sup>154</sup> The Emerald Exhibit, "Aria Di Mezzo Carattere (Final Fantasy VI Grand Finale)," YouTube Video, 5:53, July 31, 2013, [https://youtu.be/hXyNJ3\\_T218](https://youtu.be/hXyNJ3_T218).

<sup>155</sup> It is however performed in the 'native language of opera', Italian. Perhaps this is intended to allow the aria to fit better with the highbrow opera canon.

only original melodic material that is included is a short violin part in the interlude. Even the key is changed from Dmaj to Fmaj, unlike every single other version I could find, official or otherwise. Uematsu frequently rearranges his work in different styles, but rarely as drastically as this, at least not with a title like ‘Grand Finale’. Although Uematsu was greatly dismayed with the album, fan and critic reception was generally positive. I wonder if reception would have been different if this version further encroached on fans’ nostalgia, by being included in for instance a remake.

The FFVI opera is naturally also popular in compilation albums of music from the many Final Fantasy games. It was for instance included in the first *Distant Worlds* (DW) concert tour in 2007, and Uematsu’s 2008 album *The Black Mages III: Darkness and Starlight*, which is the alternative title of the opera. Although it is a bit of a stretch to call the latter (progressive power metal) album updated music, it is faithful to the material and strikingly similar to the DW version, and even features the same three opera singers. The obvious difference is its instrumentation: the strings are for instance replaced with distorted guitars and the harp with Uematsu’s iconic Hammond-style organ. Both of these versions include the notable quantitative transformation of having the ‘missing’ material that was supposed to be performed in the opera in the game, had the story gone differently. The expanded material picks up at the exact moment the opera singers are knocked out in the game during their shared section in the Duel. The new ending is nothing like the original ending, meaning the original’s less than fitting ‘Grand Finale’ is left out entirely. Draco wins the duel, as expected, but Ralse nevertheless sticks around to sing a rather awkward “Our love, come what may / Will never age a day / I’ll wait forevermore!”. Cheng accurately describes the lingering Ralse as an *opera buffa* character, a stark difference from his original heroic tenor.<sup>156</sup>

Table 13: Musical transformations in the *Distant Worlds* versions of *Draco and Maria*

Transformations	<i>Draco and Maria</i> Distant Worlds 2007	<i>Draco and Maria</i> Distant Worlds 2012
	Quantitative	Extended version
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full orchestration, including operatic voices and enhancements</li> </ul>	
Augmentative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several embellishments to melody</li> <li>• New melodic material</li> <li>• More subtle changes to harmonic parts</li> </ul>	
Revisionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New translation of the libretto</li> <li>• Much larger orchestra</li> <li>• Many parts moved to different instruments</li> <li>• Some original parts removed entirely</li> <li>• Swapped Ralse and Draco’s voice types</li> <li>• On average 20% increase in tempo</li> <li>• Replaced the original ending (Grand Finale)</li> </ul>	

<sup>156</sup> Cheng, *Sound Play: Video Games and the Musical Imagination*, 85-86.



In the DW concerts, most pieces are performed using a large orchestra. In some cases, that means the original track is heavily arranged to fit the orchestra. Ordinarily, I might not consider such arrangements updated music. However, the line between orchestral arrangement and update becomes increasingly blurry when the original itself is orchestral as well. Other than the new material, different singers and increased tempo, the DW version greatly resembles the Pixel Remaster version. There is however a divergence in orchestration. Both update the original version with lush orchestration, but the Pixel Remaster uses a slightly smaller orchestra and is noticeably more true to the original instrumentation. The DW version moves several parts to different instruments, such as harp to piano and strings to woodwinds and brass. In the process, some of the existing material has been removed entirely, including the in my opinion iconic harp accompaniment during the Aria.

This DW version has been ‘embedded’ into the game in the 2010 fanmade video *The Dream Oath Opera: Maria and Draco* by Elder Geek, not unlike the large screens in the concert hall showing visual material from the opera as portrayed in the game.<sup>157</sup><sup>158</sup> This version updates the graphics and animations, like the Pixel Remaster, and sets them to the DW version. Unlike the Pixel Remaster however, the Elder Geek video is based on the more complete opera, rather than the interrupted, altered opera found in the game. The ending is reanimated to fit the new material and the creators have even intentionally removed the awkwardly refusing to leave Ralse from the stage at the end. You can still hear him singing along off-stage, which is honestly still rather awkward.

Described as the ‘Full Version’ of the opera, the 2012 DW version for Final Fantasy’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary includes even more new material. The addition of a choir makes the most noticeable difference. The choir mostly sings along with the strings and brass parts, but there are a few augmentative transformations to its harmony as well. Interestingly, the choir has no text and sings solely through phonemical ‘ahs’, not unlike the original’s synthesised voices. Uematsu and his arrangers were of course familiar with the DW version, yet they decided not to include the choir in their remaster. The 2012 version also includes a new quantitative transformation, inserting extra material before the new ending composed for the 2007 version. In classic Uematsu fashion, the new material mixes popular music with classical music, more so than the rest of the opera. One could say that is because it was composed over 10 years after the original, but Uematsu actually composed at least part of the hitherto unused material during the game’s development. In an interview with Arnie Roth, who conducted the 2012 concerts, Roth goes into detail about Uematsu’s ideas:

[Nobuo Uematsu] always wanted to do what he called the ‘more perfect version’ of *Maria and Draco*. His idea of that was that it would have the battle music that was implied in the opera. ‘A battle was raging outside the castle walls’—and he actually had written some battle music for it, but it never ended up getting used in the game, so he always wanted to kind of complete the opera scene that we

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<sup>157</sup> Elder Geek, “Final Fantasy VI: The Dream Oath Opera - Maria and Draco (Aria di Mezzo Carattere)” YouTube Video, 10:17, <https://youtu.be/36TdZx8VgbA>.

<sup>158</sup> The music is not actually embedded into the game. Visual material is recorded separately and set to the existing music.

play live with some battle music in there. So there's about two minutes of new music that's in the opera that we've orchestrated.<sup>159</sup>

Still not entirely satisfied with the previous orchestral version, Uematsu desired to make an even 'more perfect version' of his opera. Calling it 'more perfect' implies Uematsu was not dissatisfied, and he has frequently spoken of his favouritism towards the opera. His composing philosophy of always looking for challenges and trying new things is shining through here; every version contains new changes and ideas. His process of updating music is *iterative* through and through.

The final DW version is a different kind of 'what if?' updated version. Rather than just a 'what if we had the technology/money/resources?', it is more of a 'what if Draco and Maria was performed in the way it was *supposed* to be?'. Although the version performed in the game is considered the original version, and I have described it as such here as well, it is not the *actual* original version. This may take a little imagination, but the opera was supposedly performed in the FFVI world many times *before* the version the player experiences. One could even say that there should be an original score in the game's world as well. So in a way, the 1994 and Pixel Remaster versions are no more than branches, while the DW version is the *true* updated opera.

## Fanmade works

Earlier I referred to the FFVI GBA *Sound Restoration Patch*, a mod made by user Bregalad on the romhacking.net forums. Described by Bregalad themselves as "FF6 advance as it should have been", this mod substantially alters the soundscape of the game, while also fixing some of the game's performance issues. The GBA version of FFVI was released in 2006, 12 years after the original, so people had gotten used to the very successful SNES version. The GBA release was considered an update, featuring substantial new material for fans of the original game. Even though the SNES is a much older console than the GBA, they are similar in their technological attributes, and the SNES is slightly stronger in most categories such as sound, graphics and performance. The sound quality is the largest difference; the instruments sound brighter and harsher on the GBA, such as the aggressive saw-like synths we saw used in the Champion Theme. The SNES generally uses softer, rounder synthesised instruments, even compared to its other contemporaries. Although the developers designed a custom sound engine, perhaps specifically to try to consolidate this difference, the two versions sound markedly different. The Sound Restoration Patch is intended to restore the sound of the game to its SNES original state, using softer instruments specifically created to emulate the SNES instruments. Similar mods have been made for the other GBA Final Fantasy games, including graphical mods used to tone down the brightness.<sup>160</sup> Most of the restored music sounds strikingly similar to the original, making the mods a resounding success with the fans. The FFVI mod however also goes beyond just 'restoring' the original. The only part of the restored soundtrack that is in fact not entirely based on the original, is the cherished opera scene. Unsurprisingly, this is a highly contentious issue among fans. Bregalad offers two options for the opera scene. Option 1 essentially inserts a recording of a Distant Worlds concert by the Tokyo

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<sup>159</sup> Christian Ponte, "Interview with Arnie Roth, Distant Worlds: Chicago THE CELEBRATION", YouTube Video, 37:50, November 16, 2012, <https://youtu.be/FGWjXxF6W8o>.

<sup>160</sup> The graphics were made intentionally brighter in the GBA version, because compared to the old CRT monitors and TVs often used on the SNES, the GBA screen was lacking in brightness due to it not being backlit.

Symphonic Orchestra into the scene, which includes not only a grand orchestra but also opera singers and changes to the script. This causes some incongruencies, such as imperfect visual-audio synchronisation and the immersion-breaking fact that Draco's solo in the overture is sung partly by both Draco and Ralsei, even though only Draco is on stage. Although many fans do enjoy option 1, the more heavily invested fans would probably opt for option 2, which is the supposedly faithful restoration that was added after heavy criticism from fans. Option 2 however, is no less contentious. This pertains specifically to the synthesised voices I mentioned would be an important part of fans' memories. As all of the instruments are replaced, so is the synthesised voice. User ChibiNinja expresses their issues with the mod (as politely as possible) in the following review:

While the newer version now gives the option of not using the live singers for the European version, and doesn't use the fully voiced opera at all for the other two, it still is NOT the same as the SNES opera section - rather than sounding like the vaguely voice-like sounds, it instead sounds rather definitively like actual people going 'na na nananaaaa' instead. (...) I'd say this is worth using overall for most people, but if like me you actually prefer the opera to stay as it originally was (in terms of sound, I mean) then this might be a big enough issue for you to pass this one up entirely. (...) I understand that most people aren't going to be as bothered by this as I am, but nonetheless I think it's best to be informed.<sup>161</sup>

Although I perceived the voices as more of a 'la la la'-sound, I do agree that there is something human about the new voices, something *real*.<sup>162</sup> Whereas the original voices were decidedly unreal, these seem to enter the uncanny valley of voice synthesis. They are excellent examples of that proportionally small step forward from the original voices I mentioned earlier. They sound fittingly operatic, but I personally cannot help but feel uncomfortable listening to them. Perhaps it is the fact that the voices are now limited to ah-phonemes as opposed to the ah/oh-phonemes of the original, the subtlety of which made it seem like someone was actually speaking. In particular in the Japanese version, you can actually *hear* the text. Japanese phonology is fairly simple compared to other languages, having only 5 vowel sounds, making it easier to substitute text with phonemes. Somehow, the restoration sounds both too real and too fake at the same time. That is, at least to me and this reviewer. Perhaps it is just us being *too nostalgic*.

Table 14: Musical transformations in Bregalad's Sound Restoration Patch version of Draco and Maria

Transformations	<i>Draco and Maria</i> – Bregalad's Final Fantasy VI (GBA) Sound Restoration Patch
Quantitative	None
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replaced all instruments with SNES-like counterparts</li> <li>• Replaced entire opera with DW version (optional)</li> <li>• Replaced voice with new synthesised voice</li> </ul>
Augmentative	None
Revisionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DW version of opera (optional)</li> <li>• New synthesised voice</li> </ul>

<sup>161</sup> ChibiNinja, "Romhacking.net – Review – Mostly Great – Opera is Divisive,"

<https://www.romhacking.net/reviews/2778>.

<sup>162</sup> Video and audio available at [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1iQXe-QNqFnZGf2NBt-zNKwbyNNef\\_RFM?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1iQXe-QNqFnZGf2NBt-zNKwbyNNef_RFM?usp=sharing).



Many other fans have similar issues in updating the opera. Most make no quantitative or augmentative transformations and focus entirely on recreating the original accurately. Few fans have access to a full orchestra and instead use sampled or occasionally synthesised instruments. In a way, their work is almost more faithful to the 1994 original in using these instruments as opposed to Uematsu who decided to update his work in a studio. Conveying intricate dynamics and techniques such as legato was quite challenging using 90s technology, and whereas it has become easier using modern DAWs, it is still not as accurate as recording a skilled orchestra. The vocal parts are once again the largest obstacle. Choral voices see frequent use in fanmade updated music, even when the original does not feature a choir. Solo parts however are a different beast entirely. They tend to require lyrics – impossible with sampled voices, which are generally limited to ‘ah’-phonemes. The obvious solution is to use a *real* voice instead. Although most fans may not have access to such a luxury, especially considering they would need an actual opera singer, some do. For instance, professional VGM producer Sean Schafianski’s remasters of the Overture and Aria both feature opera singers alongside Sean’s remastered orchestration.<sup>163164</sup>

Other fans need to be a bit more creative to work around the issue. YouTube channel SoundRemake offers two remakes of the entire FFVI soundtrack, released in 2020 and 2022. They describe it as “Nostalgic game music that remains in your heart, even now.”<sup>165</sup> In the first remake, the Overture, Aria, Waltz (without the Duel part) and Grand Finale are included, of which the Overture and Aria feature sampled voices. Compared to the original, the two voices are turned down significantly in volume, especially in the Aria. Instead, the Aria’s main melody is carried more by the violins, which also mirrored it in the original. The second remake is essentially an update of the previous update, and now also includes the Duel. The creator states: “I have made a sound remake of the work of FF6 in the past, but this time I have changed the sound source and tried to polish it carefully.”<sup>166</sup> In this iteration, Draco’s part in the Overture is turned up slightly compared to the now more balanced mix of the orchestra, and the choice of sampled voice is unchanged. In the Aria on the other hand, the sampled voice is removed entirely and replaced with a transverse flute. Perhaps to avoid having the two ‘voices’ clash, the trio part of the newly incorporated Duel has been left out. The creator makes few other drastic changes in the rest of the updated soundtrack, which speaks to their dissatisfaction with this particular track. By replacing the voice, SoundRemake’s Aria may now be less faithful, but neither does it allude to being so. It may still be updated music, but it can also be considered an alternative. If it is not a fitting update – if it does not *improve* upon the original, why bother going down this road? Although the Aria is now not an actual aria anymore, I personally find the revision quite fitting. In my opinion, Draco’s voice was significantly less jarring than Maria’s, even though the samples were of similar quality and it is likely both came from

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<sup>163</sup> Sean Schafianski (@sschafi1), “Final Fantasy VI - Overture [Remastered],” YouTube Video, 5:30, February 22, 2014, <https://youtu.be/EBsbkx9PzXg>.

<sup>164</sup> Sean Schafianski (@sschafi1), “Final Fantasy VI - Aria di Mezzo Carattere [Remastered],” YouTube Video, 3:40, February 22, 2014, <https://youtu.be/pMaXyf4f9t0>.

<sup>165</sup> Re-Editing the Sound of Nostalgic Game Music, “【BGM】FF6／Complete Soundtrack - 全曲 - 【サウンドリメイク】,” YouTube Video (Description), 5:00:18, November 10, 2020, translation my own, [https://youtu.be/PSEk9\\_mWg8c](https://youtu.be/PSEk9_mWg8c).

<sup>166</sup> Re-Editing the Sound of Nostalgic Game Music, “【BGM】FINAL FANTASY VI／Orchestra - Complete Full Remake Again 【サウンドリメイク】,” YouTube Video, 3:11:38, October 18, 2022, <https://youtu.be/6rdVom97ADU>.

the same sample library. Perhaps it is once again my nostalgia speaking, and Celes' voice is simply more idealised in my memories than Draco's because I have more attachment to her character than Draco's. By removing the part of the updated music that clashes with the most delicate part of the memory, this second iteration sounds more pleasant to me. Whether or not the creator feels the same as I, I do not know, but I want to imagine they do. Sharing such feelings grants a sense of community, a sense of *belonging*, and especially in the case of nostalgic retro game paratexts such as these, of having belonged all along.

Table 15: Musical transformations in SoundRemake's two remakes of Draco and Maria

Transformations	<i>Draco and Maria</i>	<i>Draco and Maria</i>
	SoundRemake Remake	SoundRemake Orchestra Remake
Quantitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duel excluded entirely</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trio in Duel excluded</li> </ul>
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete orchestration with synthesised instruments and voices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete, slightly more lavish orchestration with synthesised instruments and voices</li> </ul>
Augmentative	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
Revisionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small changes to instrumentation</li> <li>• Duel excluded entirely</li> <li>• Voices turned down</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small changes to instrumentation</li> <li>• Trio in Duel excluded</li> <li>• Maria's part replaced with transverse flute</li> </ul>

## Reception

Compared to the previous case study, commenters are noticeably less nostalgic. On most videos, nostalgia ratings are at about 9%. The OCREmix reimagining of the opera is the least like the original by far and has the lowest rating at 3%, while the highest rated video is one of the game's GBA version at 16%. This is relatively low compared to the previous case study and some Final Fantasy material I analysed for comparison, such as the Prelude I discussed in chapter 1 and *Decisive Battle*, an active theme from FFVI. Whereas many commenters are heavily emotional about their listening experience, they are predominantly focused on their emotionality, rather than nostalgia specifically. They explicitly mention reasons why they should *not* be this emotional, such as their gender (manly tears) and cultural background (unfamiliarity with opera or classical music in general). People are extremely positive about the scene and specifically its music, going so far as to call it "one of the best moments in gaming history." While not explicitly nostalgic, comments such as these do place the work in a position of cultural power over its contemporaries and those that came after. One might say the fans exhibit some features of the socio-cultural distinction between high- and lowbrow art. Quite ironic, considering they are discussing an opera as part of a videogame. Another common subject among fans is requesting a remake of the game. A *remake*, not a *remaster*. There are even plenty of such comments on the Pixel Remaster videos. This diametrically opposes the fact that many fans want their updates to be faithful. Remakes inherently have more freedom in the updating process than remasters, meaning they are more likely they stray away from the original. Some fans feel like the remaster already diverges from their idea of a remaster too much, so the developers might as well make a remake instead. Overall, fans are predominantly positive about the many updated versions of the opera, even the Grand Finale version Uematsu was so dissatisfied

with. Non-English speaking fans were the most positive by far; I found little to no negative comments in any language other than English.

Although many fans are positive about the changes made in the Pixel Remaster, others are less accepting (ranging from dissatisfied to enraged), citing its lack of faithfulness and the vocal performance.

The lyrics are all wrong and the song dull and lifeless, even the SNES version had more range and depth. Check out the original some time. @apachelives

this is ... disgusting.

The lack of respect for the game and the character... they should have left it as is rather than ... whatever wretchedness this is .

Someone took a beloved part of my past and then defecated on it. @LokasennaCole

It's supposed to be remaster not an overhaul. I do not like the change of the lyrics. @jamesloucks6152<sup>167</sup>

The original voices may not have been real, but to many fans they were. Uematsu's decision to make Celes a 'decent' singer, rather than an operatic diva, has likely played a significant role in this. It may be accurate in *his* fantasy, but it is (unsurprisingly) inaccurate in the fantasy of many others. They had 28 years to brew the perfect imaginary voice for Celes in their memories; why would she then just be 'decent'? When they are informed of Uematsu's intent some fans are more appreciative, perhaps because of their veneration of the composer, but others still disagree with the decision. Maybe their rose-coloured glasses just make them impossible to appease, but it could also simply be a matter of taste. Either way, they feel assaulted by the sheer existence of the remaster. It has damaged not only their nostalgic memories, but their very *identity*.

Conversely, the paratextual forms of the opera are less aggressively controversial among fans. My hypothesis would be based on the fact that, as I mentioned in my initial definition of updated music, updates are intended to *supersede* the original. If a piece of VGM is updated paratextually, that update is intended to supersede the paratextual consumption of the original piece. On the other hand, if the entire game is updated, that update is intended to supersede the consumption of the original game. Paratextual consumption is optional, it is extra(textual). It may be that fans find it easier to say "this is not for me" to a musical paratext, as opposed to an updated game, which they feel *should* be for them. Additionally, paratextual updates are inherently different in that they lack the direct context of the source material. They are after all, paratextual. As a result, they lack immersion, which I mentioned in chapter 2 is one of the most influential impetuses of nostalgia. Because they are less immersive, the immersion is less easily broken. It has to be noted however, that even the embedded music is here consumed paratextually by the fans, albeit in a gameplay video, which does add to the immersion. This is why I hypothesise that the type of hypertextual relationship and the developers' description thereof are paramount in determining the nostalgic reception of updated music.

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<sup>167</sup> CGInferno, "Final Fantasy VI (6) Pixel Remaster – Opera House Full Scene," YouTube Video, 21:45, February 23, 2022, <https://youtu.be/vS5X57fhEkg>, comment section.

## Conclusion

In chapter 1, I presented my model for the analysis of updated music, which I believe was a useful tool in my case studies. It allows me to break down specific individual changes and present them in a manner that makes it easier to compare different cases. I would be interested to see how the model fares in standalone music and music in other media such as film. However, the model does have its limitations. Much of my material was not drastically altered, making it easier to fit in the model compared to a complete overhaul. The most heavily changed track, the first update of the Pallet Town theme, still fit just fine, but a larger similarly altered track might pose some issues. The second limitation of the model is in its categorisation. Whereas the first three categories are relatively straightforward, the revisionary category functioned both as a 'yes/no' tick-box to answer the question of whether a change was optional or not and a 'anything that does not fit anywhere else'-category. This might need some revision. Thirdly, it is often challenging to discern the updater's intent without a detailed explanation or direct dialogue. Whereas the model does not require this knowledge, it does make some discussions somewhat speculative. Was a specific change intentional, an oversight or an error? Lastly, due to the move to more orchestral VGM, in-depth music analysis of modern games becomes increasingly challenging. Scores need to be transcribed manually and there is no raw data format, as the soundtrack is often a recording. Nevertheless, I found analysis using the updated music model an intriguing, albeit rather arduous process, granting me a look into the mind of the updater.

In the second chapter, I discussed the many facets that play a role in analysing updated music, from the relationship between fans and composers (who are also fans) to the fragility of the nostalgic memories many updaters are doing their best to uphold. There may not have been time in this thesis, but several of the examples I presented there would be interesting case studies as well. The case studies I did discuss showed how incredibly varied updaters' intentions and views on updated music can be. Most updated versions focused on qualitative transformations over any others. This meant more and higher quality instruments, but also often different instrumentations. Fans were often relatively reserved in doing so, whereas official updaters were not so inclined. They also featured significantly fewer augmentative and revisionary transformations, choosing to stick closely to the original material. Perhaps that is because, if they desired to create something entirely different, they could simply do so and call it an arrangement or cover instead. Chapter 3 featured the Pallet Town and Champion themes, which turned out to be a good place to start. The FRLG updates of these tracks were relatively brash compared to those found in the Let's Go games, illustrating how different even official updates of the same material can be, depending on the type of update, its new context and its audience. The first featured many augmentative and revisionary transformations, whereas the second primarily focused on qualitative improvements. Both updaters made significant use of their new affordances, expanding the number of parts and using a variety of instruments. Here, I also discussed some anachronistic updates, such as an update in the style of a later game, a demake and a pre-production. The Pallet Town theme was received the most nostalgically by far, its original version more so than the updates. Part of this is likely due to its role in the franchise and the composition of the track, but it is also evident that updaters spent more effort trying to keep their updates of the Pallet Town theme closer to the original than they did for the rest of the soundtrack. The updates of Maria and Draco in chapter 4 were handled very differently by their producers, although nostalgia played a large role there as well. The paratextual update allowed Uematsu

to complete the opera in the way it could have been, shedding the limitations of the medium. His PR update on the other hand, was kept closer to the original, by nature of it being called a remaster. However, he also played around with the in-game world by updating Celes' voice to be appropriately modest, a decision that was highly controversial among fans. Here, we saw how the fans' nostalgic memories can be shattered if an update does not conform to them.

Out of all of the analysed tracks, fans were most nostalgic about the originals, rather than the updates which were designed to induce nostalgia. On the one hand, this may be them favouring the original over the updates due to their rose-coloured glasses. On the other hand, if the updated music induces a desire to re-experience the original music paraludically, there is no barrier to prevent fans from doing so, and expressing their nostalgia there instead. The type of nostalgic reception was also very different from track to track. Nostalgic fans of the Pallet Town theme were severely melancholic, on the brink of the pathological, whereas the Champion theme fans were significantly more positive. Fans of Draco and Maria had a more mixed experience, focusing instead on the operatic medium and its quality. Further research on the varying nature of fans' nostalgic experiences depending on the type of material would make a fascinating endeavour.

Overall, I found that nostalgia played a major role in both the production and consumption of updated VGM. Although I had expected the fans to be highly nostalgic, many developers seemed equally emotionally invested in their interviews. Even if the fans might not have agreed with some decisions, the updaters all had the fans and nostalgia on their minds. However, they also seemed eager to make use of their new affordances and include a bit of their own musical identity in their work. The type of hypertextual relationship was of key importance here; fans give more leeway for the updaters' own creative contributions in paratexts and remakes than in the rather constrictive remasters. Although nostalgia is at the centre of updated music, it is clear that it is a highly individual experience. The updater might find their work an authentic, nostalgia-inducing version of the original, but reception may vary from tears of joy to tears of anger. This only goes to show how difficult it is to update music when there are fans who care so much as to consider it a significant part of their identity. Luckily, many updaters share the fans' nostalgia, and they do their very best to create *what could have been*, even if they might not be able to please everyone. Updated music will only become more prevalent in the future, and there are many more updated works on the way. Unlike 25 years ago, composers are facing increasingly fewer limitations nowadays. How will they update the works of today? Will they hit a ceiling, or will they try to continue to update their work? For better, or for worse?

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Games are sorted based on developer first, then franchise by date of first entry. For convenience, hypertexts are placed directly below their hypotext.

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## Appendix

### Comment data analysis

Because the keywords are lemmatised, ‘nostalgia’ also includes words such as ‘nostalgic’, ‘reminisce’ also includes words such as ‘reminiscent’, ‘child’ also includes words such as ‘childhood’ etc.

The keywords used in the comment data analysis are as follows:

1. nostalgia
2. memory
3. home
4. child
5. flashback
6. old
7. day
8. remember
9. miss
10. reminisce

Table 16: Nostalgic comment data analysis of different versions of the Pallet Town theme

<b>Pallet Town</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>% nost.</b>	<b>Source</b>
<i>Official versions</i>	RBY	45	<a href="https://youtu.be/cOWRNLaCMJg">https://youtu.be/cOWRNLaCMJg</a>
	GSC	36	<a href="https://youtu.be/eaK564p5ksc">https://youtu.be/eaK564p5ksc</a>
	FRLG	40	<a href="https://youtu.be/dfRLeXXsdnM">https://youtu.be/dfRLeXXsdnM</a>
	HGSS	22	<a href="https://youtu.be/eU9zlkfLptk">https://youtu.be/eU9zlkfLptk</a>
	LGPE (10h)	29	<a href="https://youtu.be/5O3a5opHbY4">https://youtu.be/5O3a5opHbY4</a>
	Compilation of 4	31	<a href="https://youtu.be/FVWOwXRC6gU">https://youtu.be/FVWOwXRC6gU</a>
<i>Fan remasters</i>	Zame Remaster	25	<a href="https://youtu.be/2BQsxO-wUa4">https://youtu.be/2BQsxO-wUa4</a>
	Pokeli recreation	23	<a href="https://youtu.be/fDhp1Xov45k">https://youtu.be/fDhp1Xov45k</a>
<i>Adaptations</i>	Insaneintherain (jazz)	1	<a href="https://youtu.be/P6K34epYSjo">https://youtu.be/P6K34epYSjo</a>
	Sam Griffin (guitar)	13	<a href="https://youtu.be/0ixUsvgK_SQ">https://youtu.be/0ixUsvgK_SQ</a>
	Qumu (remix)	29	<a href="https://youtu.be/yroYk0jOo-8">https://youtu.be/yroYk0jOo-8</a>
	GlitchxCity (LG remix)	1	<a href="https://youtu.be/V-Pq1XkaIsE">https://youtu.be/V-Pq1XkaIsE</a>

Table 17: Nostalgic comment analysis of different versions of the Champion theme

<b>Champion theme</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>% nost.</b>	<b>Source</b>
<i>Official versions</i>	RBY	19	<a href="https://youtu.be/nXgAj5KdAC0">https://youtu.be/nXgAj5KdAC0</a>
	FRLG	15	<a href="https://youtu.be/-4vpdkEkup8">https://youtu.be/-4vpdkEkup8</a>
	LGPE	9	<a href="https://youtu.be/Gsvjir_z5lg">https://youtu.be/Gsvjir_z5lg</a>
<i>Official alternatives</i>	XY	4	<a href="https://youtu.be/3wH-qo6HETY">https://youtu.be/3wH-qo6HETY</a>
	Origins	8	<a href="https://youtu.be/z5s4VYC9xR4">https://youtu.be/z5s4VYC9xR4</a>
	Compilation	6	<a href="https://youtu.be/aPj5Qvjz_KU">https://youtu.be/aPj5Qvjz_KU</a>
<i>Fan versions</i>	Demake	4	<a href="https://youtu.be/begSijf2w9o">https://youtu.be/begSijf2w9o</a>
	Zame remastered	9	<a href="https://youtu.be/5hdh7G1bPVQ">https://youtu.be/5hdh7G1bPVQ</a>
	Bliitzit	3	<a href="https://youtu.be/Jg2pS6gBye0">https://youtu.be/Jg2pS6gBye0</a>

Table 18: Nostalgic comment analysis of different versions of the Final Fantasy VI opera

<b>FFVI Opera</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Source</b>
<i>Official versions</i>	SNES	12	<a href="https://youtu.be/WwHrQdC02FY">https://youtu.be/WwHrQdC02FY</a>
	GBA	16	<a href="https://youtu.be/ohp9KQ7KcLE">https://youtu.be/ohp9KQ7KcLE</a>
	PR	9	<a href="https://youtu.be/vS5X57fhEkg">https://youtu.be/vS5X57fhEkg</a>
	PR all languages	8	<a href="https://youtu.be/yRR5mLdNmJU">https://youtu.be/yRR5mLdNmJU</a>
<i>Official paratexts</i>	DW 2009	9	<a href="https://youtu.be/eGl4FqUeFS0">https://youtu.be/eGl4FqUeFS0</a>
	DW 2012	9	<a href="https://youtu.be/FVQGDsl6Sow">https://youtu.be/FVQGDsl6Sow</a>
<i>Fan versions</i>	Dream Oath	6	<a href="https://youtu.be/36TdZx8VgbA">https://youtu.be/36TdZx8VgbA</a>
	Aria remastered	8	<a href="https://youtu.be/pMaXyf4f9t0">https://youtu.be/pMaXyf4f9t0</a>
	SoundRemake	9	<a href="https://youtu.be/6rdVom97ADU">https://youtu.be/6rdVom97ADU</a>
	OCReMix	3	<a href="https://youtu.be/Ln9Sq7IOP3o">https://youtu.be/Ln9Sq7IOP3o</a>
<i>Other material</i>	FFIV DW Theme of Love	17	<a href="https://youtu.be/aRXSSLPuMF4">https://youtu.be/aRXSSLPuMF4</a>
	SNES Prelude	14	<a href="https://youtu.be/dPkoNICjQFI">https://youtu.be/dPkoNICjQFI</a>
	DW Prelude	18	<a href="https://youtu.be/b3SuYFYPe4Y">https://youtu.be/b3SuYFYPe4Y</a>
	SNES Decisive Battle	14	<a href="https://youtu.be/bMOa3rjtHkE">https://youtu.be/bMOa3rjtHkE</a>

Sheet music

# Final Battle! (Rival) theme - Pokémon FireRed/LeafGreen

Arrnaged by Go Ichinose

$\text{♩} = 170$

The musical score is arranged for a full orchestra and includes the following parts:

- Bandurria, #5/6
- Voice, #3/7
- Saw Synthesizer, #2
- Saw Synthesizer, #1
- Saw Synthesizer, #4
- Horn, #3/5
- Trumpet, #3/5
- Electric Guitar, #5
- Electric Guitar, #7
- Electric Guitar, #5/6
- Timpani, #6
- Violas (section), #5/6
- Electric Guitar, #3
- Electric Piano, #6
- Carillon, #7
- Drumset, Track 16
- Harp, #5/7
- Drumset, Track 18

The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 170 beats per minute. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The Bandurria part features a complex melodic line with many accidentals. The Voice part has a few notes. The Saw Synthesizer parts have rhythmic patterns. The Horn, Trumpet, and Electric Guitar parts are mostly silent. The Timpani part has a few notes. The Violas part is silent. The Carillon part has a few notes. The Drumset parts have rhythmic patterns. The Harp part is silent.

2

2

Band. #5/6  
Vo. #3/7  
Synth. #2  
Synth. #1  
Synth. #4  
Hn. #3/5  
Timp. #6  
D. Set

Detailed description: This system contains measures 2 and 3 of the score. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The Band #5/6 part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The Voice #3/7 part has a vocal line with some rests. Synth #2 is in the bass clef with a simple accompaniment. Synth #1 has a more complex melodic line. Synth #4 is in the bass clef with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Horn #3/5 has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. Timp #6 has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The Drum Set part shows a pattern of eighth notes and rests.

4

Vo. #3/7  
Synth. #2  
Synth. #1  
Synth. #4  
Hn. #3/5  
El. Guit. #5  
El. Guit. #5/6  
Timp. #6  
D. Set

Detailed description: This system contains measures 4 and 5. The key signature remains three flats. The Voice #3/7 part has a vocal line with some rests. Synth #2 is in the bass clef with a simple accompaniment. Synth #1 has a melodic line. Synth #4 is in the bass clef with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Horn #3/5 has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. Electric Guitar #5 has a melodic line with some bends. Electric Guitar #5/6 has a melodic line. Timp #6 has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The Drum Set part shows a pattern of eighth notes and rests.



6

Vo. #3/7

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

El. Guit. #5

El. Guit. #5/6

D. Set

Hrp. #5/7

8

Vo. #3/7

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

D. Set

Hrp. #5/7

4

9

Vo. #3/7

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

El. Guit. #5/6

D. Set

Hrp. #5/7

Detailed description: This system contains measures 9 and 10. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The time signature is 3/7. The vocal line (Vo. #3/7) features a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B-flat4, C5, B-flat4, A4, G4. The synth parts (Synth. #1, #2, #4) provide harmonic support with various rhythmic patterns. The electric guitar (El. Guit. #5/6) has a few notes in measure 10. The drum set (D. Set) and harp (Hrp. #5/7) provide a steady accompaniment.

11

Vo. #3/7

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

Hn. #3/5

Tpt. #3/5

Timp. #6

D. Set

Detailed description: This system contains measures 11, 12, 13, and 14. The key signature remains three flats. The vocal line (Vo. #3/7) has a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B-flat4, C5, B-flat4, A4, G4. The synth parts (Synth. #1, #2, #4) continue their accompaniment. The horn (Hn. #3/5) plays a sustained chord. The trumpet (Tpt. #3/5) has a melodic line in measure 14. The timpani (Timp. #6) and drum set (D. Set) provide rhythmic accompaniment.

14

Band. #5/6

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

El. Guit. #5

El. Guit. #5/6

D. Set

16

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

El. Guit. #5

El. Guit. #5/6

D. Set

6

18

Band. #5/6

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

Hn. #3/5

Timp. #6

Vlas. #5/6

D. Set

D. Set

Detailed description: This page contains a musical score for measures 18 and 19. The score is written for a variety of instruments. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 5/6. The instruments and their parts are: Band #5/6 (Tuba/Euphonium) in the first staff, starting with a rest in measure 18 and playing a melodic line in measure 19; Synth #2 (Bass) in the second staff, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes; Synth #1 (Treble) in the third staff, playing a melodic line with some rests; Synth #4 (Bass) in the fourth staff, playing a melodic line; Hn. #3/5 (Horn) in the fifth staff, playing a simple melodic line; Timp. #6 (Timpani) in the sixth staff, playing a rhythmic pattern; Vlas. #5/6 (Vibraphone) in the seventh staff, playing a melodic line; and two D. Set (Drum Set) parts in the eighth and ninth staves, with the first D. Set playing a rhythmic pattern and the second D. Set playing a melodic line.

20

Band. #5/6

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

Hn. #3/5

Tpt. #3/5

Timp. #6

Vlas. #5/6

D. Set

D. Set

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for measures 20 through 22. The score is for a large ensemble. Band #5/6 plays a melodic line in the treble clef. Synth #2 plays a bass line in the bass clef. Synth #1 plays a melodic line in the treble clef. Synth #4 plays a bass line in the bass clef. Horn #3/5 and Trumpet #3/5 play chords in the treble clef. Timpani #6 plays a rhythmic pattern in the bass clef. Violas #5/6 play a rhythmic pattern in the bass clef. Two D. Set parts play a rhythmic pattern in the bass clef. The key signature has three flats, and the time signature is 5/6.

23

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

El. Guit. #5

El. Guit. #5/6

El. Guit. #3

D. Set

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for measures 23 through 25. Synth #2 plays a bass line in the bass clef. Synth #1 plays a melodic line in the treble clef. Synth #4 plays a bass line in the bass clef. Electric Guitar #5 plays a melodic line in the treble clef. Electric Guitar #5/6 and Electric Guitar #3 play chords in the treble clef. D. Set plays a rhythmic pattern in the bass clef. The key signature has three flats, and the time signature is 5/6.

8

25

Band. #5/6  
Synth. #2  
Synth. #1  
Synth. #4  
El. Guit. #5/6  
D. Set  
D. Set

Detailed description: This system of musical notation covers measures 25 and 26. It features seven staves. The top staff, labeled 'Band. #5/6', is in treble clef and shows a melodic line with eighth-note runs and a final quarter rest. The second staff, 'Synth. #2', is in bass clef with a steady eighth-note bass line. The third staff, 'Synth. #1', is in treble clef with a similar eighth-note pattern. The fourth staff, 'Synth. #4', is in bass clef with a more complex eighth-note sequence. The fifth staff, 'El. Guit. #5/6', is in treble clef and contains block chords. The sixth staff, 'D. Set', is a drum set part with various rhythmic patterns and accents. The seventh staff, another 'D. Set', is mostly silent with a few notes.

27

Band. #5/6  
Synth. #2  
Synth. #1  
Synth. #4  
El. Guit. #5/6  
El. Guit. #3  
D. Set

Detailed description: This system of musical notation covers measures 27 and 28. It features seven staves. The top staff, 'Band. #5/6', continues the melodic line from the previous system. The second staff, 'Synth. #2', maintains the eighth-note bass line. The third staff, 'Synth. #1', continues its eighth-note pattern. The fourth staff, 'Synth. #4', continues its eighth-note sequence. The fifth staff, 'El. Guit. #5/6', shows block chords. The sixth staff, 'El. Guit. #3', is mostly silent with a few notes. The seventh staff, 'D. Set', continues the drum set part with various rhythmic patterns and accents.

29

Band. #5/6  
Synth. #2  
Synth. #1  
Synth. #4  
El. Guit. #5/6  
El. Guit. #3  
D. Set

This musical system covers measures 29 and 30. It features seven staves: Band #5/6, Synth #2, Synth #1, Synth #4, El. Guit #5/6, El. Guit #3, and D. Set. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 5/6. Measure 29 shows a complex texture with the band playing a melodic line, synth parts providing harmonic support, and the electric guitar playing chords. The drum set provides a steady rhythmic accompaniment.

31

Synth. #2  
Synth. #1  
Synth. #4  
Hn. #3/5  
Tpt. #3/5  
El. Guit. #5/6  
El. Guit. #3  
D. Set

This musical system covers measures 31 and 32. It features eight staves: Synth #2, Synth #1, Synth #4, Hn. #3/5, Tpt. #3/5, El. Guit #5/6, El. Guit #3, and D. Set. The key signature remains three flats and the time signature is 5/6. Measure 31 continues the instrumental arrangement with the horn and trumpet parts entering. Measure 32 shows a change in the drum set's pattern and the electric guitar playing sustained chords.



10

33

Synth. #2  
Synth. #1  
Synth. #4  
Vlas. #5/6  
El. Pno. #6  
Car. #7  
D. Set

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 33 and 34. It features seven staves: Synth. #2 (treble clef), Synth. #1 (treble clef), Synth. #4 (bass clef), Vlas. #5/6 (bass clef), El. Pno. #6 (treble clef), Car. #7 (treble clef), and D. Set (drum set). The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). Measure 33 shows active parts for Synth. #2, Synth. #4, Vlas. #5/6, El. Pno. #6, Car. #7, and D. Set. Synth. #1 has a whole note chord. Measure 34 continues the patterns, with Synth. #1 playing a long note.

35

Synth. #2  
Synth. #1  
Synth. #4  
Vlas. #5/6  
El. Pno. #6  
Car. #7  
D. Set

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 35 and 36. It features the same seven staves as the previous block. Measure 35 shows Synth. #2 and Synth. #4 with active parts, while Synth. #1 has a whole note chord. Measure 36 continues the patterns, with Synth. #1 playing a whole note chord.

37

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

Vlas. #5/6

El. Pno. #6

Car. #7

D. Set

38

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

Vlas. #5/6

El. Pno. #6

Car. #7

D. Set

12

39

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

Vlas. #5/6

El. Pno. #6

Car. #7

D. Set

40

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

Vlas. #5/6

El. Pno. #6

Car. #7

D. Set

41

Band. #5/6  
Synth. #2  
Synth. #1  
Synth. #4  
Hn. #3/5  
Vlas. #5/6  
El. Pno. #6  
Car. #7  
D. Set

This system of music covers measures 41 and 42. It features eight staves: Band. #5/6, Synth. #2, Synth. #1, Synth. #4, Hn. #3/5, Vlas. #5/6, El. Pno. #6, Car. #7, and D. Set. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 5/6. Measure 41 shows various instrumental entries and rests. Measure 42 continues the musical development with more active parts across all instruments.

43

Band. #5/6  
Synth. #2  
Synth. #1  
Synth. #4  
El. Guit. #5  
El. Guit. #5/6  
D. Set

This system of music covers measures 43 and 44. It features seven staves: Band. #5/6, Synth. #2, Synth. #1, Synth. #4, El. Guit. #5, El. Guit. #5/6, and D. Set. The key signature remains three flats and the time signature is 5/6. Measure 43 shows dense melodic and harmonic activity in the upper staves. Measure 44 concludes the system with sustained notes and rhythmic patterns.

14

45

Synth. #2  
Synth. #1  
Synth. #4  
Hn. #3/5  
El. Guit. #5  
El. Guit. #5/6  
Vlas. #5/6  
D. Set

This musical score covers measures 45 to 47. It features eight staves: Synth. #2 (top), Synth. #1, Synth. #4, Hn. #3/5, El. Guit. #5, El. Guit. #5/6, Vlas. #5/6, and D. Set (bottom). The key signature is three flats (B-flat major/D-flat minor). Synth. #2 plays a continuous eighth-note melody. Synth. #1 and Synth. #4 provide harmonic support with various note values. Hn. #3/5 has rests in measures 45 and 46, then plays a chord in measure 47. El. Guit. #5 and El. Guit. #5/6 play eighth-note patterns, with El. Guit. #5/6 featuring a double bar line and a fermata in measure 47. Vlas. #5/6 has rests in measures 45 and 46, then plays a chord in measure 47. D. Set plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents.

48

Synth. #2  
Synth. #1  
Synth. #4  
El. Guit. #5  
El. Guit. #7  
El. Guit. #5/6  
D. Set

This musical score covers measures 48 to 50. It features seven staves: Synth. #2, Synth. #1, Synth. #4, El. Guit. #5, El. Guit. #7, El. Guit. #5/6, and D. Set (bottom). The key signature is three flats. Synth. #2 continues with its eighth-note melody. Synth. #1 and Synth. #4 play chords and moving lines. El. Guit. #5 and El. Guit. #7 play eighth-note patterns. El. Guit. #5/6 plays chords. D. Set plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents.

50

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

El. Guit. #5

El. Guit. #7

El. Guit. #5/6

D. Set

52

Vo. #3/7

Synth. #2

Synth. #1

Synth. #4

Hn. #3/5

Timp. #6

D. Set

Figure 14: Score of Pokémon FireRed/LeafGreen's Champion theme, adapted from Mark Carroll,  
<https://www.vgmusic.com/file/3ad29036fc8df21d1a0df2078f1b4bc.html>.

## Final Battle! (Rival) - Pokémon: Let's Go! Pikachu/Eevee

Arranged by Shota Kageyama

$\text{♩} = 171$

Horn 1

Horn 2

Trumpet 1

Trumpet 2

Trombone

Timpani

Drum Set

Electric Guitar

Electric Bass

Violin I

Violin II

Violins III

Contrabasses



2

3

Musical score for measures 2-6. The score includes parts for Tbn., Timp., D. Set, El. Guit., Vlns. (two staves), and Cbs. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The Tbn. part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Timp. part has a single drum stroke at the end of the measure. The D. Set part shows a sequence of drum strokes. The El. Guit. part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Vlns. parts have a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Cbs. part has a simple bass line.

7

Musical score for measures 7-11. The score includes parts for Tpt., Tbn., Timp., D. Set, Vlns. (two staves), and Cbs. The key signature changes to two sharps (F# and C#). The Tpt. part has a melodic line. The Tbn. part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Timp. part has a single drum stroke at the end of the measure. The D. Set part shows a sequence of drum strokes. The Vlns. parts have a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Cbs. part has a simple bass line.

9

Musical score for measures 9-11. The score includes parts for Tpt., Tbn., Timp., D. Set, El. Guit., Vlns. (two staves), and Cbs. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). Measure 9 shows the Tpt. and Tbn. with quarter notes, Timp. with a single note, D. Set with a complex rhythmic pattern, El. Guit. with a single note, Vlns. with a sixteenth-note melody, and Cbs. with quarter notes. Measure 10 continues the patterns. Measure 11 concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs.

12

Musical score for measures 12-15. The score includes parts for Tpt., Tbn., Timp., D. Set, El. Guit., Vlns. (two staves), and Cbs. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). Measure 12 shows the Tpt. with a whole note, Tbn. with a half note, Timp. with a quarter note, D. Set with a complex rhythmic pattern, El. Guit. with a quarter-note melody, Vlns. with a half note, and Cbs. with a quarter-note melody. Measure 13 continues the patterns. Measure 14 shows the Vlns. with a sixteenth-note melody. Measure 15 concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs.

4

16

Musical score for measures 16-19. The score includes parts for Tpt. (Trumpet), Tbn. (Tuba), Timp. (Timpani), D. Set (Drum Set), El. Guit. (Electric Guitar), Vlns. (Violins), and Cbs. (Cello). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The music features a mix of sustained notes and rhythmic patterns, with the electric guitar and cello providing a steady accompaniment.

20

Musical score for measures 20-23. The score includes parts for Tpt. (Trumpet), Tbn. (Tuba), D. Set (Drum Set), El. Guit. (Electric Guitar), Vlns. (Violins), and Cbs. (Cello). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The music continues with a mix of sustained notes and rhythmic patterns, showing more active melodic lines in the trumpet and tuba parts.

23

Musical score for measures 23-25. The score is for a band ensemble and includes parts for Tpt. (Trumpet), Tbn. (Tuba), D. Set (Drum Set), El. Guit. (Electric Guitar), El. B. (Electric Bass), Vlns. (Violins), and Cbs. (Cello). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many rests and accents. The Tpt. and Tbn. parts have a melodic line with eighth notes and dotted rhythms. The D. Set part is highly rhythmic with many accents. The El. Guit. part has a melodic line with eighth notes and a final chord. The El. B. part has a simple bass line with quarter notes. The Vlns. part has a melodic line with eighth notes and a final chord. The Cbs. part has a simple bass line with quarter notes.

26

Musical score for measures 26-29. The score is for a band ensemble and includes parts for Tpt. (Trumpet), Tbn. (Tuba), D. Set (Drum Set), El. Guit. (Electric Guitar), El. B. (Electric Bass), and Vlns. (Violins). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many rests and accents. The Tpt. and Tbn. parts have a melodic line with eighth notes and dotted rhythms. The D. Set part is highly rhythmic with many accents. The El. Guit. part has a melodic line with eighth notes and a final chord. The El. B. part has a simple bass line with quarter notes. The Vlns. part has a melodic line with eighth notes and a final chord.

6

30

Musical score for measures 30-33. The score includes parts for Tpt. (Trumpet), Tbn. (Tuba), D. Set (Drum Set), El. Guit. (Electric Guitar), El. B. (Electric Bass), and Vlns. (Violins). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The Tpt. parts feature eighth-note patterns. The Tbn. part has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The D. Set part shows a consistent drum pattern with snare and tom-tom hits. The El. Guit. part has a melodic line with eighth notes. The El. B. part provides a bass line with eighth notes. The Vlns. part has a melodic line with eighth notes.

34

Musical score for measures 34-37. The score includes parts for Hn. (Horn), Tpt. (Trumpet), Tbn. (Tuba), D. Set (Drum Set), El. Guit. (Electric Guitar), and El. B. (Electric Bass). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The Hn. part has a melodic line with quarter notes. The Tpt. parts have a melodic line with quarter notes. The Tbn. part has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The D. Set part shows a consistent drum pattern with snare and tom-tom hits. The El. Guit. part has a melodic line with quarter notes. The El. B. part provides a bass line with eighth notes.

38

Hn.  
Tpt.  
Tpt.  
Tbn.  
D. Set  
El. Guit.  
El. B.  
Vlns.

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for measures 38 through 41. The Horn part (Hn.) is in the bass clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), playing a sequence of notes: B2, A2, G2, F#2, E2, D2. The Trumpet parts (Tpt.) are in the treble clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a melodic line with a slur over measures 39 and 40. The Trombone part (Tbn.) is in the bass clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes. The Drum Set (D. Set) part is in the treble clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a complex rhythmic pattern with various note values and rests. The Electric Guitar (El. Guit.) part is in the treble clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a melodic line with a slur over measures 39 and 40. The Electric Bass (El. B.) part is in the bass clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes. The Violins (Vlns.) part is in the treble clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a melodic line with a slur over measures 39 and 40.

42

Tpt.  
Tpt.  
Tbn.  
Timp.  
D. Set  
El. Guit.  
El. B.  
Vlns.

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for measures 42 through 45. The Trumpet part (Tpt.) is in the treble clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a melodic line with a slur over measures 42 and 43. The second Trumpet part (Tpt.) is in the treble clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a melodic line with a slur over measures 42 and 43. The Trombone part (Tbn.) is in the bass clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes. The Timpani (Timp.) part is in the bass clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes. The Drum Set (D. Set) part is in the treble clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a complex rhythmic pattern with various note values and rests. The Electric Guitar (El. Guit.) part is in the treble clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a melodic line with a slur over measures 42 and 43. The Electric Bass (El. B.) part is in the bass clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes. The Violins (Vlns.) part is in the treble clef with a key signature of two sharps, playing a melodic line with a slur over measures 42 and 43.

8

46

Hn.

Hn.

Tpt.

Tpt.

Timp.

D. Set

El. Guit.

El. B.

Vlins.

Detailed description: This page of a musical score contains measures 46 through 49. The score is arranged in eight staves. The top two staves are for Horns (Hn.), with the first in bass clef and the second in treble clef. The next two staves are for Trumpets (Tpt.) in treble clef. The fifth staff is for Timpani (Timp.) in bass clef. The sixth staff is for Drums (D. Set) in a standard drum notation. The seventh staff is for Electric Guitar (El. Guit.) in treble clef. The eighth staff is for Electric Bass (El. B.) in bass clef. The bottom staff is for Violins (Vlins.) in treble clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#). Measure 46 shows the beginning of the section with various rests and notes. Measure 47 continues the melodic lines. Measure 48 features a prominent drum pattern with snare and hi-hat. Measure 49 concludes the section with a final chordal structure.



50

Hn.

Hn.

Tpt.

Tpt.

Timp.

D. Set

El. Guit.

El. B.

Vlns.

Cbs.

Figure 15: Score of Pokemon Let's Go's Champion theme, transcription adapted from MuseScore user AnonymousRandomPerson, <https://musescore.com/user/48740439/scores/8526920>.

# Overture - Final Fantasy VI

Composed by Nobuo Uematsu

Musical score for Overture - Final Fantasy VI, measures 1-5. The score includes parts for Flute, Horn, Trumpet, Timpani, Cymbals, Snare Drum, Harpsichord, Harp, Draco, Violas, Contrabass, and Contrabasses. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The piece concludes with a 3/4 time signature change.

6

Continuation of the musical score for Overture - Final Fantasy VI, measures 6-9. This section focuses on the Timpani (Timp.), Cymbals (Cym.), Snare Drum (SD), Violas (Vlas.), and Contrabass (Cb.) parts. The key signature remains one sharp (F#). The time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4 at the beginning of measure 6.

2

12

Vlas.

Cb.

17

Vlas.

Cb.

22

Vlas.

27

Timp.

Cym.

Vlas.

Cb.

31

Hrp.

35

Hrp.

39

Hrp.

43

Hrp.

47

Vlas.

Cb.

53

Timp.

Cym.

SD

Vlas.

Cb.

55

Cym.

SD

Draco

Vlas.

Cb.

Cbs.

62

Timp.

Draco

Vlas.

Cb.

Cbs.

4

71

Musical score for measures 71-73. The score includes staves for Timp., Vlas., Cb., and Cbs. The Vlas. part features a melodic line with triplets. The Cb. and Cbs. parts provide harmonic support with chords and bass lines.

74

Musical score for measures 74-76. The score includes staves for Hn., Timp., Vlas., Cb., and Cbs. The Hn. part has a melodic line with triplets. The Vlas. part continues with triplets. The Cb. and Cbs. parts provide harmonic support.

77

Musical score for measures 77-79. The score includes staves for Hn., Timp., Vlas., Cb., and Cbs. The Hn. part has a melodic line with triplets. The Vlas. part continues with triplets. The Cb. and Cbs. parts provide harmonic support.

79

79  
Hn. Treble clef, melodic line with triplets.  
Timp. Bass clef, accompaniment.  
Vlas. Bass clef, accompaniment with triplets.  
Cb. Bass clef, accompaniment with triplets.  
Cbs. Bass clef, accompaniment.

81

81  
Hn. Treble clef, melodic line with triplets.  
Timp. Bass clef, accompaniment.  
Vlas. Bass clef, accompaniment with triplets.  
Cb. Bass clef, accompaniment with triplets.  
Cbs. Bass clef, accompaniment.

84

84  
Hn. Treble clef, melodic line with triplets.  
Tpt. Treble clef, melodic line with triplets.  
Timp. Bass clef, accompaniment with triplets.  
Cym. Percussion, cymbal.  
SD Percussion, snare drum with triplets.  
Vlas. Bass clef, accompaniment with triplets.  
Cb. Bass clef, accompaniment with triplets.

6

85

Musical score for measures 85-86. The score includes parts for Horn (Hn.), Trumpet (Tpt.), Tympani (Timp.), Cymbals (Cym.), Snare Drum (SD), Violas (Vlas.), and Contrabass (Cb.). Measures 85 and 86 feature a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. The Horn and Trumpet parts have triplets of eighth notes. The Tympani part has a triplet of eighth notes. The Snare Drum part has a triplet of eighth notes. The Viola part has a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. The Contrabass part has a triplet of eighth notes.

86

Musical score for measures 86-87. The score includes parts for Horn (Hn.), Trumpet (Tpt.), Tympani (Timp.), Snare Drum (SD), Violas (Vlas.), and Contrabass (Cb.). Measures 86 and 87 feature a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. The Horn and Trumpet parts have triplets of eighth notes. The Tympani part has a triplet of eighth notes. The Snare Drum part has a triplet of eighth notes. The Viola part has a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. The Contrabass part has a triplet of eighth notes.



Musical score for measures 87-88. The score includes parts for Horn (Hn.), Trumpet (Tpt.), Timpani (Timp.), Cymbal (Cym.), Snare Drum (SD), Violas (Vlas.), Contrabass (Cb.), and Bass (Cbs.). Measure 87 features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets in the Horn, Snare Drum, and Viola parts. Measure 88 continues with sustained notes in the Horn and Cymbal, and rhythmic patterns in the Snare Drum, Viola, and Bass parts.

Musical score for measures 89-90. The score includes parts for Horn (Hn.), Timpani (Timp.), Snare Drum (SD), Violas (Vlas.), Contrabass (Cb.), and Bass (Cbs.). Measure 89 features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets in the Horn, Snare Drum, and Viola parts. Measure 90 continues with sustained notes in the Horn and Cymbal, and rhythmic patterns in the Snare Drum, Viola, and Bass parts.

8

91

91  
Hn. Treble clef, melodic line with triplets.  
Timp. Bass clef, accompaniment.  
SD Percussion, rhythmic pattern with triplets.  
Vlas. Bass clef, accompaniment with triplets.  
Cb. Bass clef, accompaniment with triplets.  
Cbs. Bass clef, accompaniment.

93

93  
Hn. Treble clef, melodic line with triplets.  
Timp. Bass clef, accompaniment.  
SD Percussion, rhythmic pattern with triplets.  
Vlas. Bass clef, accompaniment with triplets.  
Cb. Bass clef, accompaniment with triplets.  
Cbs. Bass clef, accompaniment.

95

95  
Hn. Treble clef, melodic line with triplets.  
Timp. Bass clef, accompaniment.  
SD Percussion, rhythmic pattern with triplets.  
Vlas. Bass clef, accompaniment with triplets.  
Cb. Bass clef, accompaniment with triplets.  
Cbs. Bass clef, accompaniment.

97

Musical score for measures 97-98. The score includes parts for Timp., SD, Vlas., Cb., and Cbs. The Timp. part has a simple melodic line. The SD part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with triplet markings. The Vlas. part has a complex melodic line with triplet markings. The Cb. and Cbs. parts provide harmonic support with simple rhythmic patterns.

99

Musical score for measures 99-104. The score includes parts for Fl., Timp., SD, Vlas., Cb., and Cbs. The Fl. part has a melodic line starting in measure 99. The Timp. part has a simple melodic line. The SD part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with triplet markings. The Vlas. part has a complex melodic line with triplet markings. The Cb. and Cbs. parts provide harmonic support with simple rhythmic patterns. The score includes a 2/4 time signature change in measure 102.

105

Musical score for measures 105-108. The score includes parts for Fl., Hch., and Cbs. The Fl. part has a melodic line. The Hch. part has a complex melodic line. The Cbs. part provides harmonic support with simple rhythmic patterns.

10

109

Fl.

Hch.

Cbs.

114

Fl.

Hch.

Cbs.

118

Fl.

Hch.

Cbs.

122

Fl.

Hch.

Cbs.

The image displays a musical score for the Overture of Final Fantasy VI, adapted from the game's soundtrack. The score is presented in four systems, each corresponding to a different measure range: 126-129, 130-134, 135-138, and 139. Each system includes staves for Flute (Fl.), Harp (Hch.), and Cello/Double Bass (Cbs.).

**System 1 (Measures 126-129):** The Flute part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The Harp part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and arpeggiated figures. The Cello/Double Bass part plays a steady bass line with chords.

**System 2 (Measures 130-134):** The Flute part continues with a melodic line, including some rests. The Harp part features a series of chords and arpeggiated figures. The Cello/Double Bass part plays a steady bass line with chords.

**System 3 (Measures 135-138):** The Flute part continues with a melodic line. The Harp part features a series of chords and arpeggiated figures. The Cello/Double Bass part plays a steady bass line with chords.

**System 4 (Measure 139):** The Flute part concludes with a melodic line. The Harp part features a series of chords and arpeggiated figures. The Cello/Double Bass part plays a steady bass line with chords.

Figure 16: Score of Final Fantasy VI's Overture, adapted from Mister G!,  
<https://archive.rpgamer.com/games/ff/ff6/ff6mid.html>.