

## Introduction

### Final Fantasy VII's Musical Legacy

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**ABSTRACT** In the introduction to this Special Issue of the *Journal of Sound and Music in Games*, the guest editors outline the history and significance of the Japanese role-playing game *Final Fantasy VII*. They situate the game within the history of technological developments in both home gaming systems and the World Wide Web, exploring the musical importance of the game. The editors also provide an overview of the Special Issue's contents and highlight the broader issues that are explored in the contributions contained therein. **KEYWORDS** transmediality, PlayStation, reception, audience, Nobuo Uematsu, remakes, history

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#### ON LEGACY AND CANON: FINAL FANTASY VII'S ENDURING SUCCESS

In early 2020, a popular two-panel meme circulated online that commented on the enduring popularity and apparent longevity of the *Final Fantasy* (FF) video game franchise. The first image features a screenshot of an iconic scene from *Final Fantasy IV* (SNES 1991), in which the protagonists Cain, Rosa, Cecil, Rydia, and Edge fight for their lives against Asura, Queen of the Feymarch, in all their pixelated glory. Its caption reads, "What you think *Final Fantasy* was 20 years ago." The second image is a screenshot from *Final Fantasy X* (PlayStation 2, 2001) which, in contrast with the 16-bit character sprites of the earlier title, features the more lifelike, three-dimensional avatars of the characters Tidus, Wakka, and Yuna as they engage in their own battle against two airborne villains. The caption above this image reads, "*Final Fantasy* 20 years ago" (Figure 1). Although slightly inaccurate—*Final Fantasy X* was released nineteen years before the meme was created—this diptych clearly positions itself to elicit poignant, nostalgic reactions among longstanding fans of the series, serving as a stark reminder (for some players, at least) that the "good 'ol days" of 16-bit pixel art and character designs that are now synonymous with the popular JRPG series are over thirty years behind us.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of writing, the seventh mainline game in the series—*Final Fantasy VII* (PlayStation, 1997, hereafter *FF7*)<sup>2</sup>—was released over twenty-six years ago. Although over a quarter of a century old, *FF7* and its associated characters, imagery, and music have retained

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1. As recently as this year, the series' developer Square Enix (formerly SquareSoft) demonstrated its awareness of the enduring appeal of this art-style and its indelible ties to the *FF* franchise: notwithstanding its exceptionally realistic character models, the series' most recent instalment *Final Fantasy XVI* (2023) includes an animated 16-bit character avatar for each of its playable protagonists in the in-game menu, clearly appealing to the same sort of nostalgic recall as the meme pictured in Figure 1.

2. Throughout this issue, we abbreviate using arabic numerals but retain roman numerals for full titles. *Final Fantasy VII Remake* is generally abbreviated to *Remake*.

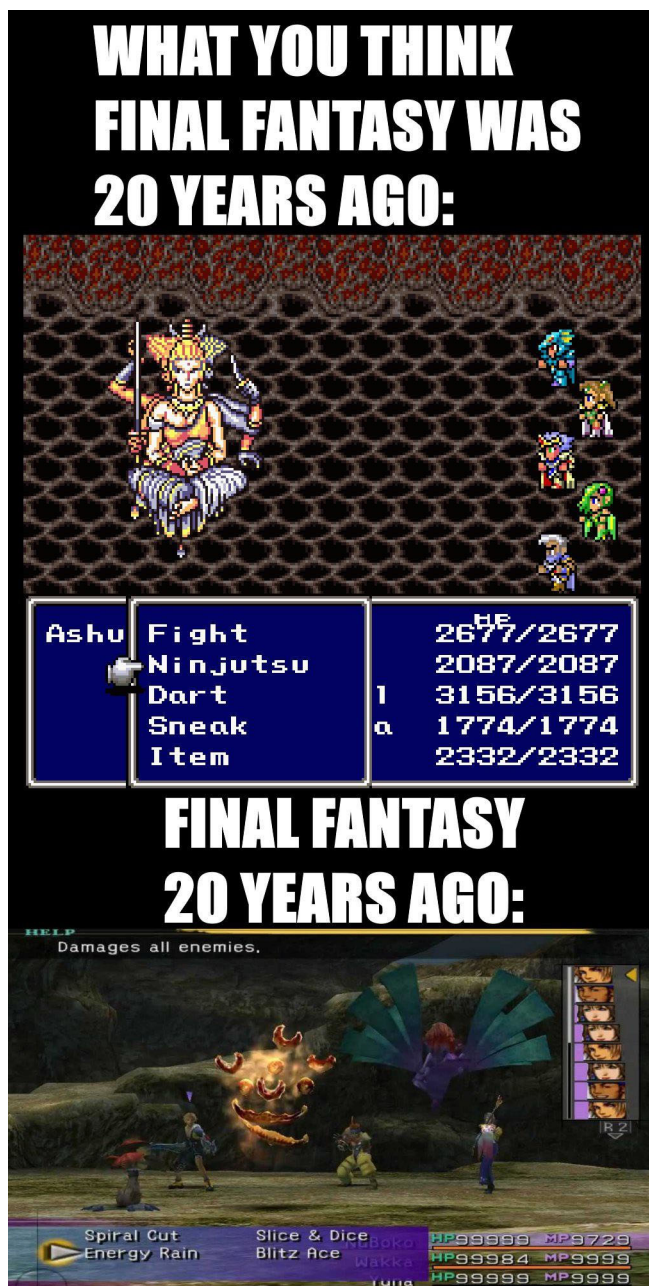


FIGURE 1. The popular internet meme that was circulated in 2020.

an unusually prominent place in the popular consciousness in the intervening decades. While this has certainly been a consequence of the universal praise that the game met at the time of its release,<sup>3</sup> it is also partly due to the various prequel and sequel games, movies, novels, and

3. *FF7* received numerous accolades upon its release, including several distinctions at the Japan Game Awards (the Scenario Award, Sound Award, and Grand Prize) and the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences Awards (Console Adventure Game of the Year, Console Role Playing Game of the Year). Japan Game Awards, “CESA大賞

novellas that have spun out from the initial game over the last few decades and which continue to canonically elaborate on the original title's fictional lore: an ever-expanding transmedial franchise often referred to as the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* (further discussed below). *FF7*'s success within the *FF* franchise is unparalleled: no other *FF* game has enjoyed the same degree of transmedial universe expansion,<sup>4</sup> nor forged so strong a presence beyond the confines of its self-contained diegesis (many of its characters also appear in the Disney/Square Enix crossover franchise *Kingdom Hearts*, for example). This significance cannot be understated: something about *this particular installment* of the popular franchise spoke to millions of RPG fans worldwide, sparking a fervent desire for further elaboration on its characters' shared histories and the future of Midgar, Gaia, and the Lifestream.

Many different factors led to *FF7*'s success: the PlayStation's sophisticated 32-bit hardware afforded players their first three-dimensional *FF* experience and, in so doing, created an expansive world in which players felt newly immersed. Fans were mostly forgiving of the game's various quirks—both mechanically and linguistically<sup>5</sup>—as they had never quite experienced such a realistic interactive universe, polygon characters notwithstanding. Despite its idiosyncrasies, as well as the undeniably convoluted nature of its sprawling sci-fi narrative, *FF7* offered a fantasy-meets-future dystopian epic that proved compelling for millions of players worldwide. Its cast of complex, nuanced characters further contributed to this appeal, as did its underlying themes concerning identity, a search for belonging, and the importance of family, which seemed to speak directly to more universal facets of a shared human experience. The developers at SquareSoft (the company's name in North America prior to its merger with Enix in 2003) were likely aware that these traits counted among the game's strongest selling points: its original teaser trailer billed the game as an “epic adventure” with “state of the art 3D graphics and animation” and “over sixty minutes of cinematic sequences.”<sup>6</sup> Using language normally reserved for film trailers, one television

<sup>4</sup> ‘97-受賞作品一覧’ (“CESA Grand Prize '97—List of Award-Winning Works”), accessed July 10, 2023, <https://awards.cesa.or.jp/1997/jyushou.html>; Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences. “The Award: Award Updates.” *Interactive.org*, c.1998, accessed July 10, 2023, [https://web.archive.org/web/1998061509015fw\\_/http://www.interactive.org/html/award/awardwin98.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/1998061509015fw_/http://www.interactive.org/html/award/awardwin98.htm); see also Bill Loguidice and Matt Barton, *Vintage Games: An Insider Look at the History of Grand Theft Auto, Super Mario, and the Most Influential Games of All Time* (Burlington; Oxford: Focal Press, 2009), 78.

<sup>5</sup> 4. Although *FF7* trails behind *Final Fantasy XIV* in terms of units sold, this does not take into account all of the spinoff games that officially expand the story's lore and canon. When combined with *Crisis Core*, *Dirge of Cerberus*, and *Final Fantasy VII Remake*, *FF7* and *Final Fantasy XIV* are practically equal in terms of units sold. What's more, this comparison does not take into account many of the spinoffs of *FF7* that were released as mobile games, many of which were free to play. See sources compiled at “Best-Selling Square Enix Games,” *Video Game Sales Wiki*, last edited July 11, 2023, accessed July 14, 2023, [https://vgsales.fandom.com/wiki/Best\\_selling\\_Square-Enix\\_games](https://vgsales.fandom.com/wiki/Best_selling_Square-Enix_games).

<sup>6</sup> 5. The original English-language release of *FF7* in PAL/NTSC territories boasted a famously quaint (and sometimes misleading) translation of the game's original Japanese script. Certain mistranslations—such as the now famous subject-verb disagreement in Aeris's well-known comment “This guy are sick”—have become iconic among the *FF* fan community. Other mistranslations simply furnished players with incorrect information, with potentially dire in-game consequences. For instance, when Cloud and Barret fight against the Guard Scorpion in Mako Reactor No. 1, players are prompted to “Attack while it's tail's up!” In addition to the use of an incorrect additional apostrophe, adhering to this advice can result in a powerful retaliatory move that can kill both members of the party and result in a Game Over for players (the correct advice is to attack when the creature's tail is down).

<sup>7</sup> 6. GameTrailersUnited, “*Final Fantasy VII* Original Trailer,” January 29, 2010, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utVE4aUKYUy>.

commercial described the game as the year's "most anticipated adventure," whimsically commenting that it would never be released in theaters:

Beyond the edge of reality lies a story of ultimate conquest. A story of war and friendship. A story of a love that can never be, and a hatred that always was. And now, the most anticipated adventure of the year will never come to a theater near you:  
*Final Fantasy VII*<sup>7</sup>

Unlike earlier titles in the series, *FF7* was released amid the early days of mass public access to the internet.<sup>8</sup> At the time of *FF7*'s release in 1997, over 45 million people worldwide had access to the internet, a number that rose to over 400 million by the year 2000.<sup>9</sup> *FF7* arrived during a time when webhosting companies like GeoCities and Angelfire began providing opportunities for the public to create free homepages dedicated to their hobbies and interests, exemplifying the precise sort of contributory impetus and prosumer behaviors that were to become the defining properties of Web 2.0. In 1997, GeoCities alone was ranked as the fifth most popular website on the internet; by the end of 1999, it was the third most visited website, reflecting the number of new users and the diversity of fan pages being created.<sup>10</sup> Webhosting platforms like these enabled *FF* fans from around the world to concurrently interact with one another for the first time and share their theories on the game's fictional history, their favorite screenshots, fan-made MIDI files of the game's music, even rumors on how to "save Aeris" from meeting her inevitable fate at the Forgotten City. Such assemblies of ardent fans neatly epitomise what Henry Jenkins—channelling French cybertheorist Pierre Lévy's work on collective intelligence—refers to as *knowledge communities*: online networks of enthusiasts and amateur analysts, in which "members work together to forge new knowledge often in realms where no traditional expertise exists" and where "the pursuit of and assessment of knowledge is at once communal and adversarial."<sup>11</sup> While many factors contributed to *FF7*'s success, it could also be convincingly argued that the game found itself in the right place at the right time too, as this new online model for public expressions of fandom became hugely influential in perpetuating the unprecedented international hype that shrouded the game's release.

7. Mina, "Final Fantasy VII - US Commercial (1997)," June 28, 2017, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDxikKSDtZg>.

8. Although the internet went public in 1991, the number of users did not surpass 1 percent of worldwide population until 1997. See sources compiled at "Internet Growth Statistics," *Internet World Stats*, 2022, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.internetworldstats.com/emarketing.htm>.

9. Although it is difficult to ascertain the exact amount of internet users from the 1990s, different sources have similar numbers. Regardless as to the exact number of users, it is important to note the significant increase from 1997 to the turn of the millennium. Janna Quitney Anderson, *Imagining the Internet: Personalities, Predictions, Perspectives* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 43.

10. GeoCities was created in 1994 and gained enormous popularity by 1997. In 1999, approximately 11 percent of GeoCities users were between the ages of three and fifteen. Michelle Z. Hall, "Internet Privacy or Information Piracy: Spinning Lies on the World Wide Web," *New York Law School Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 620; C. J. Reynolds, and Blake Hallinan, "The Haunting of GeoCities and the Politics of Access Control on the Early Web," *New Media & Society* 23, no. 11 (2021): 3274; Ian Watson, *The Universal Machine* (New York: Copernicus, 2012), 237.

11. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 20; see also Pierre Lévy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1997).

## "LISTEN TO THE CRIES OF THE PLANET": THE MUSIC OF *FINAL FANTASY VII*

The music of *FF7* regularly finds itself at the center of discussions concerning the game's enduring legacy. Written by Nobuo Uematsu—the sole composer for the first nine mainline *FF* games (1987–2000) and a figure who has developed something of an iconic status in video game music—the game's score has drawn praise from fans, critics and, of course, musicians worldwide.<sup>12</sup> As the first *FF* title for Sony's new PlayStation console, Uematsu was able to incorporate more dense musical textures, greater polyphony, and wider stylistic diversity due to the system's more technologically advanced sound hardware.<sup>13</sup> Continuing the trend that he established with his soundtrack for *Final Fantasy IV* six years earlier, Uematsu adopted a similarly leitmotivic approach in his music for *FF7*, writing memorable character themes, battle cues, and location music that interacted with one another and evolved alongside the game's unfolding narrative.<sup>14</sup> *FF7*'s soundtrack, like the game itself, was enormously well-received by fans and critics alike, reaching No. 3 on Japan's Oricon charts a total of thirteen times.<sup>15</sup> The game's music continues to be arranged and performed by both professional and amateur musicians worldwide today,<sup>16</sup> and has been afforded a noteworthy degree of radio play compared to the music of other successful video games, as scholars like William Gibbons have highlighted.<sup>17</sup>

Uematsu's soundtrack for *FF7* was innovative in a number of ways, establishing itself as a significant landmark in the history of game music in the process. While these innovations are addressed in great detail throughout this Special Issue of *JSMG*, three in particular are worth spotlighting here. First, the game's self-titled "Main Theme to *Final Fantasy VII*" is the longest and most formally complex of Uematsu's *FF* main themes, totaling just over six minutes and consisting of multiple self-contained sections. Secondly, the music accompanying the final boss fight, "One-Winged Angel," was the first *FF* track to include recorded voices alongside Uematsu's more usual synthesized instrumentation. While this track may not have been the first video game music to achieve this, it has become so wildly popular within the *FF* fanbase at game music

12. Nobuo Uematsu's status as a "legacy" composer in the video game music canon has been addressed at length elsewhere, and so is not addressed here. See Richard Anatone, "Introduction," in *The Music of Nobuo Uematsu in the Final Fantasy Series*, ed. Richard Anatone, (Bristol: Intellect, 2022), 1–7; Karen Cook, William Gibbons, Julianne Grasso, and Hyeonjin Park, "Colloquy: Canons of Game Music and Sound," *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 1, no. 1 (2020): 75–99.

13. See Tim Summers, "Dimensions of Game Music History," in *The Routledge Companion to Screen Music and Sound*, ed. Miguel Mera, Ron Sadoff, and Ben Winters, 139–152 (New York: Routledge, 2017), and Karen Collins, *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 69–70.

14. See Richard Anatone, "Leitmotivic Strategies in Nobuo Uematsu's *Final Fantasy* Soundtracks," *Music Theory Spectrum* 45, no. 2 (Fall 2023) and Tim Summers, *Understanding Video Game Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 158–76.

15. "Final Fantasy VII Original Soundtrack," *Oricon News*, accessed July 14, 2023, <http://www.oricon.co.jp/prof/artist/67810/products/music/239084/1/>.

16. See Stefan Xavier Greenfield-Casas, "Re: Replay: On the Classical Arrangement and Concertization of Video Game Music," PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2022.

17. See William Gibbons, "Music, Genre, and Nationality in the Postmillennial Role-Playing Game," in *The Routledge Companion to Screen Music and Sound*, ed. Miguel Mera, Ron Sadoff, and Ben Winters (New York: Routledge, 2017), 413.

concerts and beyond that it has become synonymous with the game itself, as James S. Tate argues.<sup>18</sup> Lastly, and perhaps most impactfully outside of the somewhat niche world of video game music, *FF7* might be seen as the first video game soundtrack to penetrate the world of “classical music,” with “Aerith’s Theme” entering *Classic FM*’s “Hall of Fame” in 2012 and peaking at No. 3 in 2013<sup>19</sup>—much to the chagrin of many traditional classical music connoisseurs.<sup>20</sup> In what may be considered an attempt to persuade such resistant audiences, *Classic FM* has even likened the composer to Beethoven, Wagner, and John Williams—three names that are frequently lionized in the world of popular classical music.<sup>21</sup> For better or for worse, the music of *FF7* has helped to elevate the art of video game music to those who are still unwilling to accept its artistic legitimacy.

Though its place within video game history has been the source of much debate among fans and scholars alike, *FF7* has been lauded by many as one of the greatest RPGs and greatest video games of all time.<sup>22</sup> Its success led to the series’ first transmedial expansion of an individual mainline title’s fictional lore: the aforementioned *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII*, which was officially announced at the 2003 Tokyo Game Show.<sup>23</sup> By 2005—only eight years after the original game’s debut—SquareSoft had released a mobile game (*Before Crisis*, 2004), a full-length feature film (*Advent Children*, 2005), and a twenty-five-minute anime short (*Last Order*, 2005), with the spin-off games *Dirge of Cerberus* (2006) and *Crisis Core* (2007) in the works, each of which elaborated on the shared histories and future of Midgar, AVALANCHE, Shinra, and many of the game’s other memorable characters and locations. Eventually, *FF7*’s writer Kazushige Nojima would release a collection of short stories and a novel—*On the Way to a Smile* (2009) and *The Kids Are All Right: A Turkside Story* (2011) respectively—to further expand this epic saga with new stories and characters, some of whom would

18. James S. Tate, “The Devil in the Detail: Analyzing Nobuo Uematsu’s ‘One-Winged Angel’ from *Final Fantasy VII*,” in *The Music of Nobuo Uematsu in the Final Fantasy Series*, ed. Richard Anatone (Bristol: Intellect, 2022), 35–37.

19. Elizabeth Davis, “Here’s Why Aerith’s Theme from *Final Fantasy VII* Is a Symphonic Masterpiece,” *ClassicFM.com*, March 21, 2019, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.classicfm.com/composers/uematsu/aeriths-theme-final-fantasy/>.

20. Many *Classic FM* listeners made hostile comments concerning video game music when “Aerith’s Theme” first appeared on the “Hall of Fame” chart. “Classic FM Hall of Fame 2013,” *TalkClassical*, April 8, 2013, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.talkclassical.com/threads/classic-fm-hall-of-fame-2013.24888/>. The idea of film music and video game music being brought into the traditional “classical” canon is still met with resistance from many today, though considerably less than it was even a decade ago. See, for example, Norman Lebrecht, “Berlin Phil and Philadelphia Orch Join Dumbest-Down BBC Proms,” *Slipped Disc*, April 26, 2022, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://slippedisc.com/2022/04/berlin-phil-and-philadelphia-orch-redeem-dumbest-down-bbc-proms/>.

21. Classic FM, “Here’s How Nobuo Uematsu Changed the Course of Classical Music with His *Final Fantasy* Score,” June 10, 2019, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.classicfm.com/composers/uematsu/music/final-fantasy-soundtrack/>.

22. Although these ranking systems and “charts” are purely subjective, they still hold cultural significance in shaping the “unofficial canon” within popular culture. See GameSpot Staff, “The Greatest Games of All Time: *Final Fantasy VII*,” *GameSpot* May 5, 2008, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/the-greatest-games-of-all-time-final-fantasy-vii/1100-6155700/>, and Mike Rougeau, “52: *Final Fantasy VII*,” *IGN* (c. 2017), accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.ign.com/lists/top-100-rpgs/52>.

23. Although announced in 2003, it is likely that development began a year or two earlier. IGNPS2, “TGS 2003: *Final Fantasy VII*: The Movie?,” *IGN*, June 30, 2016, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.ign.com/articles/2003/09/25/tgs-2003-final-fantasy-vii-the-movie>.

eventually find their way into 2020's much-anticipated *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (hereafter *Remake*).

### RUMORS OF A REMAKE: FULFILLING THE PROMISE

Though purely speculative, there is ample evidence to suggest that SquareSoft had been planning to revisit the original *FF7* narrative and priming its fanbase to expect an elaborate, big-budget remake of the 1997 game since the early days of the *Compilation*. The first currents that would eventually give way to this momentous media whirlwind can be traced back the E3 expo in May 2005, where fans were treated to a brief unplayable recreation of the now iconic introductory cinematic from the original *FF7*. Although the title-card for this short recreation was emblazoned with the unambiguous subheading “TECHNICAL DEMO FOR PS3,” this did little to dissuade audience speculation that a full playable remake of *FF7* was secretly in development, so much so that Square Enix had to make regular statements concerning the project's non-existence.<sup>24</sup> Similar turbulence arose at the PlayStation Experience expo event in December 2014, when Shinji Hashimoto of Square Enix introduced a trailer for a direct port of the original 1997 game for the PlayStation 4. During the clip's opening moments, enthusiastic fans were so convinced that they were watching a trailer for a full-length *FF7* remake that their ensuing disappointment was quite visible, and subsequently became commodified as an online comic strip (Figure 2). Eventually, at the twenty-first E3 event in June 2015, when Square Enix finally revealed that they were indeed developing a playable remake, the announcement trailer's austere VO even made reference to the trepidatious path of *Remake*'s pre-development, and featured a playfully self-referential script which extra-textually alluded to the previous decades of drama and speculation (“perhaps it was no more than wishful thinking,” “at last the promise has been made,” etc.). Unsurprisingly, this eventual reveal was met with nigh on universal excitement and approval.

At face value, these wildly differing audience responses to the various milestones in the prehistory of *Remake*—which visibly range from malcontent and ennui, to elation and incredulity—might be understood as a simple reflection of the oft-acknowledged trappings of adapting a much-beloved work: the “daunting creative challenge” faced by all those involved in the maintenance of cherished franchises which, as scholars like Vasco Hexel note, always boasts the risk of disappointing devoted fans.<sup>25</sup> However, these contrasting reactions also cogently illustrate other more nuanced points about recent video game remakes more generally, as well as the curious intersection of stylistic impetuses that the developers of a notional remake of *FF7* seem to have always been destined to negotiate. On one hand, the 2005 “technical demo for PS3” delighted audiences on account of its cinematic and “trailerized” presentation of this beloved

24. Jeremy Dunham, “Square Enix Responds to PS3 *FF7* Rumors,” *IGN*, May 23, 2006, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.ign.com/articles/2006/05/23/square-enix-responds-to-ps3-ff7-rumors>.

25. Vasco Hexel, *Hans Zimmer and James Newton Howard's The Dark Knight: A Film Score Guide* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 18.



FIGURE 2. Square Enix’s Shinji Hashimoto introduces a trailer for the PS4 port of *FF7* at Sony’s PlayStation Experience event in 2014. Fans’ disappointment upon discovering that the trailer was not for a remake of *FF7* was quickly commodified as a four-panel online comic strip (often accompanied by a fifth and unrelated image of Hashimoto, doubled over in laughter). Here, the image has been recreated using screenshots from the original broadcast, which was uploaded to YouTube by MrMario2011 on December 9, 2014.

introductory sequence,<sup>26</sup> yet its complete lack of interactivity—alongside a caveat regarding the improbability of a playable rendering ever being developed—became a point of great frustration for audiences. The year 2014 gave rise to equivalent malcontent, when PS4 owners were offered the chance to truly revisit the original title as players, yet without any technical/aesthetic updates nor the cinematic potential with which they had seen Midgar’s skyline and Cloud Strife imbued almost a decade prior. Even when *Remake* was finally announced in 2015—arguably the apogee of this extended period of growing anticipation and demand—the prospect of diluting the playthrough experience of the original game’s narrative by dividing it into multiple installments (an idea which producer Yoshinori Kitase has stated “was there from the very beginning”)<sup>27</sup> proved to be yet another divisive point, contradicting audiences’ perceived impression of what a *Remake* could or should be.

26. Here, we use the term “trailerized” in the same manner as Jason Scott, who takes it to denote a media object’s more general imbue with the aesthetics and functionality of Hollywood film trailers. This is distinct from the term’s more widely understood meaning in the context film music studies and advertising, where “trailerized” denotes the trope of recreating preexisting pop/rock music in a very particular manner associated with film trailers, whereby “originals are typically slowed down, fragmented, and occasionally reversed in meaning.” See Jason Scott, “Disneyizing Home Entertainment Distribution,” in *DVD, Blu-Ray and Beyond: Navigating Formats and Platforms within Media Consumption*, ed. Jonathan Wroot and Andy Willis (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 27, accessed July 14, 2023, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62758-8\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62758-8_2); James Deaville, “Quick Takes—Trailers for Coming Attractions (2018), or: The Trailer and the Cover Song,” *AMS Musicology Now*, October 2, 2017, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://musicologynow.org/quick-takes-trailers-for-coming-attractions-2018-or-the-trailer-and-the-cover-song/>.

27. See Matt Kamen, “The *Final Fantasy VII* Remake Will Be Released Episodically,” *Wired*, December 7, 2015, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/final-fantasy-vii-remake-is-episodic>.



Certainly, this question of what a *Remake* “could” or “should” be is entirely subjective: developers, fans, and critics each have their own standards and tastes as to how a piece of existing art could or should be modified, or if it should even be remade at all.<sup>28</sup> The same, of course, could be said of *FF7*’s music. In addition to its newly-composed material, *Remake*’s soundtrack reworked, rearranged, and reorchestrated much of Nobuo Uematsu’s music from the original 1997 release. This was no small feat: many composers and arrangers throughout Japan—including *FF* stalwarts like Masashi Hamauzu and Mitsuto Suzuki—collaborated under the supervision of Square Enix’s music director Kenji Kawamori on this project.<sup>29</sup> The team’s deft navigation of such a daunting task resulted in an official soundtrack consisting of 156 tracks that combined genuine nostalgic admiration of the original source material with a sincere interest in creating a musical artefact that sounded both familiar and new for fans.<sup>30</sup> With such genuine attention to detail from some of Square Enix’s most well-known and skilled composers, arrangers, and performers, it is perhaps fitting then that *Remake*’s soundtrack met similar success as the original game’s soundtrack, winning several awards including the “Best Soundtrack Award” at the 2020 *Game Awards*<sup>31</sup> and Japan’s “Gold Disc Award” for soundtrack album of the year.<sup>32</sup>

Over three years have passed since the release of *Remake*, a title which has received mostly positive reviews from players and critics despite its many necessary changes to the story and gameplay mechanics of the original. Fans of both the original game and its *Remake* are eagerly awaiting the remaining two installments of Square Enix’s planned trilogy of games, which the company has promised will be “enough to tell the full story” of the original 1997 game.<sup>33</sup> The very creation of *Remake* thus fulfills a longstanding promise that Square Enix appeared to obliquely make to their fans almost two decades prior. It is with this living story of the game’s transmedial success in mind that we feel it is appropriate to dedicate an entire issue of the *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* to

28. For example, over the last several years, it has become apparent that director Yoshinori Kitase wanted to include more drastic changes to the original game’s narrative compared to his colleagues. See Robert Ramsey, “Interview: *Final Fantasy VII Remake* Producer and Co-Director on Development, Launch, and Being Grateful for the Fans,” *PushSquare*, May 24, 2020, accessed July 14, 2023, [https://www.pushsquare.com/news/2020/05/interview\\_final\\_fantasy\\_vii\\_remake\\_producer\\_and\\_co-director\\_on\\_development\\_launch\\_and\\_being\\_grateful\\_for\\_the\\_fans](https://www.pushsquare.com/news/2020/05/interview_final_fantasy_vii_remake_producer_and_co-director_on_development_launch_and_being_grateful_for_the_fans), and Ed Nightingale, “*Final Fantasy 7 Remake* Producer Says Story Changes Were Necessary to Keep People’s Interest,” *Eurogamer*, February 6, 2023, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.eurogamer.net/final-fantasy-7-remake-producer-says-story-changes-were-necessary-to-keep-peoples-interest>.

29. A complete list of composer and arranger credits for *Remake* is found on “*Final Fantasy VII Remake* Original Soundtrack,” *Final Fantasy Wiki*, last edited June 5, 2023, accessed July 14, 2023, [https://finalfantasy.fandom.com/wiki/Final\\_Fantasy\\_VII\\_Remake\\_Original\\_Soundtrack](https://finalfantasy.fandom.com/wiki/Final_Fantasy_VII_Remake_Original_Soundtrack).

30. Mat Ombler, “Behind the Music of *Final Fantasy VII Remake*,” *Spitfire Audio*, c. 2020, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://composer.spitfireaudio.com/en/articles/behind-the-music-of-final-fantasy-vii-remake>.

31. Kara Bodegon-Hikino, “*Final Fantasy VII Remake* Wins Best Score and Music at the Game Awards 2020,” *Bandwagon*, December 11, 2020, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.bandwagon.asia/articles/final-fantasy-vii-remake-wins-best-score-and-music-at-the-game-awards-2020>.

32. Corey Prasek, “*Final Fantasy VII Remake* Soundtrack Wins Japan’s Gold Disc Award,” *Otaquest*, March 15, 2021, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.otaquest.com/final-fantasy-vii-remake-soundtrack-gold-disc-award/>.

33. Chris Scullion, “*Final Fantasy 7 Remake* Could Have Been in Two Parts, Rather than a Trilogy,” *Video Games Chronicle*, July 8, 2022, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/final-fantasy-7-remake-could-have-been-in-two-parts-rather-than-a-trilogy>.

the musical legacy of *FF7* and the long-standing, ever-expanding transmedia franchise that it bore.

#### THAT WHICH LIES AHEAD...

As the guest editors of this Special Issue of the *Journal of Sound and Music in Games*, we are thrilled to finally present this vibrant celebration of *FF7*'s musical legacy: a collection of scholarly articles and invited contributions from composers, arrangers, performers, educators, and authors that we have been assembling over the last two-and-a-half years, to roughly coincide with the soundtrack's twenty-fifth anniversary and anticipate the release of *Final Fantasy VII Rebirth*—the second of the remake's three installments—early next year.

The issue begins with a series of research articles which, consistent with the policies and standard practices of *JSMG*, have been subject to a rigorous double-blind peer review process, supplemented with internal reviews by both the guest editors and the journal's editors-in-chief. In the first of five articles, **Richard Anatone** presents a compelling leitmotivic analysis of the soundtrack for the original 1997 game which, by framing Uematsu's compositional methodology within the four-act narrative framework of *Kishōtenketsu*, offers new theory-informed perspectives on the main theme's role in both musical and character development. Thereafter, **Kevin Courcelle** examines the role of the voice in the original *FF7*: by emphasizing a recurring in-game vocal sound effect as a central "Moan" leitmotif, his article offers a novel semantic reading that frames the unseen "Ancients" as a binding force in the narrative, rendered omnipresent in the score through various musical and aural/oral iterations and associations. **Jessica Kizzire** embraces Peter Brian Barry's conception of the "mirror thesis" in the issue's third article, adopting this philosophical conception of an agonistic struggle between good vs. evil as an analytical lens in her deft handling of Uematsu's character themes for Aerith and Sephiroth. **Demetrius Shahmehri** then draws upon personal experience to explore the nostalgic legacy of *FF7*'s story and identify the soundtrack's ability to manifest the narrative's past: by sonically exposing its own "narrative history" and depicting this temporal realm as accessible in the original release, Shahmehri addresses the innovative possibilities and restrictive conditions in *Remake*'s recent reimagining of *FF7*'s story (and its score). In the issue's final peer-reviewed article, **James Denis Mc Glynn** expands on the oft-acknowledged convergence of filmic and ludic scoring idioms in recent AAA video game soundtracks to suggest the existence of a "cinematic promise" endemic to contemporary game music, and—using *Remake* as a central case study—offers a careful examination of melodic-motivic, harmonic, and orchestration techniques to elucidate this dynamic.

It has been wonderful to see this exciting and eclectic collection of scholarly perspectives on the music of *FF7* coalesce over the past number of years. However, it quickly became clear to us as editors that, in order to attain a more complete picture of the game's musical legacy, it would be essential to foreground the voices of a wider community of musicians and creators for whom *FF7* has long served as an important source of creative inspiration: the very fan-creatives who have collectively kept the game's characters,

narrative, and music alive during the past quarter-century, as explored in the opening section of this Introduction. To this end, a series of additional contributions were solicited, forming the latter half of this Special Issue. The first of these contributions documents a vibrant roundtable discussion that took place between the issue's guest editors and a group of individuals from three very distinct professions, yet who are united by the shared influence that *FF7* has borne on each of their careers: author **M.J. Gallagher**, game designer **Patrick Holleman**, and composer **Wilbert Roget, II**. Through personal reflection on *FF7*'s profound influence on their respective areas of expertise, this roundtable gave way to a compelling interdisciplinary interaction that freely moves between discussion of the game's musical, mythological, narratological, and historical precedents and influences. The second of this Special Issue's invited contributions is a record of a second memorable roundtable discussion that took place between the editors and three well-known performers/arrangers of video game music: composer and music producer **Alex Moukala**, pianist **PurpleSchala** (Ruby Tuong) and acapella vocalist **Smooth McGroove** (Max Gleason). Each of these individuals found success and garnered a considerable online following as a result of their popular YouTube videos and imaginative reworkings of pre-existing video game music. During this eclectic and insightful interaction, our panelists highlighted the enormous significance that they each place on Uematsu's music for *FF7*, as well as detailing the game's conspicuously causal impact on their distinct and storied careers in music. Offering insights into their arrangement and performance practices, a powerful dialogue emerged that explored issues relating to online content creation and community interaction in the ever-evolving distribution platforms and social media that have shaped their careers. Excitingly, the roundtable's emphases often moved beyond our (originally quite specific) intentions to encompass a much more universal contemplation of game music's potential to serve as a meaningful and transformative force in our world, in which our panelists shared their common experiences of game music's potential role in identity formation at profound moments in peoples' lives, as well as exploring its capacity to perpetuate a sense of inclusivity that distinguishes the video game music community from that of many other (online) music cultures. In the final of the issue's invited contributions, it seems fitting that **Stefan Greenfield-Casas** should revisit discussions of canon and the monumentalization of *FF7*'s music in his insightful review-article of the *Final Fantasy VII Remake Orchestral Arrangement Album* (2020), offering a critical exploration of this CD release and tackling issues of canon preservation and source material in counterpoint with considerations of originality and (re)arrangement.

A note on names in the *FF7* universe and in this special issue: Pronunciation and transliteration of characters' names have varied across *FF7*'s releases and related materials, and similarly vary among fans. For example, those who first played the 1997 North American release of *FF7* were introduced to "Aeris" Gainsborough, whereas "Aerith," became the official English spelling of her name beginning with her appearance in *Kingdom Hearts* (PlayStation 2, 2002).<sup>34</sup> In the spirit of respecting our contributors'

34. The name "Aeris" was also used in the 1998 North American release of *Final Fantasy Tactics*.

genuine lived memories of a franchise that has impacted their lives so greatly, we have decided against any standardized transliteration of the many names throughout this issue, and allowed each contributor to use that with which they have a personal connection and genuine memory.

As guest editors, compiling this Special Issue of *JSMG* afforded us a rare and extended opportunity to delve into new facets of this oft-discussed music at a unique intersection analytical, philosophical, theoretical, and practice-informed perspectives. We hope that the contributions contained herein will offer you the same opportunity to consider and experience/re-experience this music in similarly vibrant ways, and that our issue serves as a useful companion to this most striking of case studies: a title which gave rise to both a monumentally successful transmedia franchise and a game soundtrack which has projected far beyond its original context to garner an indelible post-existence beyond the screen.<sup>35</sup> ■

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35. For an in-depth exploration of the notion of post-existing music, see Jonathan Godsall, "Hi-Yo, Rossini: Hearing Pre-Existing Music as Post-Existing Music," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cinematic Listening*, ed. Carlo Cenciarelli (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 317–35.

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