
The “Cinematic Promise” of Video Game Music

Stylistic Convergence, Current-Generation Remakes, and the Case of Final Fantasy VII

ABSTRACT Consonant with recent developments that have contributed to the ongoing convergence of film and video game forms, a common aspiration exists among many contemporary “Triple A” titles to fulfill what we might call the “cinematic promise” of video games. Many recent releases illustrate that a shift has taken place towards certain games’ stylistic harnessing and hybridisation of cinematic idioms that, in turn, transforms the experience being marketed to gamers. One title in which these dual-aspirations are especially conspicuous is *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (Square Enix, 2020), a game that straddles an intricate balance between channelling elements of both the cinematic and the game’s original identity as a fifth-generation video game.

This article explores the ongoing convergence of scoring idioms for films and games. *Remake* is adopted as a central case study, considering the extent to which game and film music idioms coalesce as part of the game’s idiosyncratic musical identity and are foregrounded as a result of their interaction. I argue that the tension between *Remake*’s clear efforts to channel aspects of the cinematic alongside sounds, timbres, and compositional structures from the original game affords us new insights into: the relationship between film and game music; remakes and adaptations more generally; and game soundtracks that adapt pre-existing music. Beginning with overviews of existing research on (i) film and game music, and (ii) music in remakes, the article culminates in musical analyses of both *Final Fantasy VII* and its *Remake*, illustrating the palpable tension that emerges between *Remake*’s concessions to both film and game scoring conventions: arguably the defining characteristic of the game’s musical identity. **KEYWORDS** film music, remakes, stylistic convergence, Nobuo Uematsu, *Final Fantasy VII*

INTRODUCTION

Game Music, Film Music, and the “Cinematic Promise” of Video Games

The nascent musicological subdiscipline of ludomusicology has long nurtured an admirable acceptance of interdisciplinarity, with many of its prominent exponents consciously striving to preserve the field’s vibrant intersection of methods and approaches. It is interesting then that, existing alongside this aspiration, a core tenet of much ludomusicological thought asserts that our study of sound and music in games must necessarily be understood as being quite separate from existing scholarly approaches to music and sound in cinema.¹ Irrespective of any similarities between games and films, as well as

1. The first decade of game studies’ early development gave rise to an equivalent “ludologically educated assumption that video games are different from cinema,” leading some to argue that any comparison was “only tangentially useful due to the irreconcilably different nature of the two media.” See Ivan Girina, “Cinematic Games: The Aesthetic Influence of Cinema on Video Games” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2015), 6.

ludomusicology's clear conceptual and methodological debts to so much existing screen scoring research, it is now well established that the nature of our object of study (music and sound in games) is quite distinct from what is being explored in film music studies—functionally, aesthetically, stylistically, and historically—such that any direct application of methods and theories concerning film music must be handled with due trepidation.² One alternative way for us to navigate this delicate disciplinary bridge and avoid handling game music *as* film music—which risks mapping concepts and theories onto game scores in ways that might excessively foreground surface similarities between the two forms—is to instead turn one's focus to the undeniable “cinematic *promise*” of video games as a medium, examining how this manifests itself in certain types of game soundtracks that we can analyze.

By cinematic promise, I refer to the latent aspiration to evoke the sights and sonorities of contemporary Hollywood film that persists throughout the development and marketing of so many video games. As Ivan Girina notes, “the adjective ‘cinematic’ is a concept constantly evoked in cultural discourses concerning video games. Magazines, reviewers, critics, but also designers, artists, users, and commentators (even scholars) often summon the idea of cinematic games in the attempt of describing some peculiar features that share affinities with films and suggesting that video games possess the aura of the big screen.”³ Will Brooker likewise highlights how the early game studies scholars Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska “identify an assumption within the industry that ‘more cinematic equals “better” [...] a judgement accepted by many reviewers.”⁴ Of course, the idea of selling games with the promise of a player experience that is “like a movie” is hardly a new concept. Putting to one side direct film adaptations and tie-ins (derivations for which game producers typically “seek out expected iconic styles and the associated and visible Hollywood composers”),⁵ one could even think back to some of the earliest video games like *Spacewar!* (1962) or *Computer Space* (1971)—titles that clearly capitalised on the themes and language of the sci-fi films and serials that were popular at the time⁶—to see that this idea has existed as long as video games have. It is also widely accepted that this aspiration, when taken to extremes, rarely yields positive results: the early LaserDisc “experiments in making games more like movies” such as *Dragon's Lair* (1983) and *Space Ace* (1984) now count among the most infamous examples of games that sacrificed interactivity for cinematic aesthetics.⁷ Today however, things are quite different, especially when more than ever before, games can come exceptionally close to replicating the

2. Karen Collins, *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 5.

3. Girina, “Cinematic Games,” 6.

4. Will Brooker, “Camera-Eye, CG-Eye: Videogames and the ‘Cinematic,’” *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 3 (2009): 125; Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, eds., *Screenplay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 6.

5. Ron Sadoff, “Scoring for Film and Video Games: Collaborative Practices and Digital Post-Production,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media*, ed. Carol Vernallis, Amy Herzog, and John Richardson (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 668.

6. Collins, *Game Sound*, 8.

7. Trevor Elkington, “Film,” in *Encyclopedia of Video Games: The Culture, Technology, and Art of Gaming*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf, 2nd Edition (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2021), 344.

visual and technical achievement of high-budget blockbuster feature films. Audience expectations for music and sound in games have likewise evolved in tandem with developments in audio fidelity and playback, as scholars like Karen Collins and Kyle Worrall have highlighted.⁸ What is more, in the wake of other recent developments that have contributed to the ongoing convergence of film and video game forms—stylistically, aesthetically, and in terms of industry production practices⁹—many recent titles reveal that a more general shift has taken place towards video games’ stylistic harnessing and hybridisation of certain cinematic idioms. This shift has often been identified in studies of music in so-called *interactive dramas* which have been influential in “obfuscating the line between film and video games,”¹⁰ yet the impact of this cinematic promise on the music of other types of games has been explored far less. One such title in which these dual-aspirations of the cinematic and the ludic are most conspicuous is *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (Square Enix, 2020): a game that tangibly straddles a balance between channeling elements of (i) the cinematic, and (ii) *Final Fantasy VII*’s original identity as a fifth-generation video game. This is never more apparent than in the game’s musical score: with the prominent pre-existence of many musical themes heard in *Remake*, as well as the narrative and ludic reimplementations of that pre-existing musical material throughout the game, an in-depth musical analysis of *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (hereafter *Remake*) can shed considerable light on this convergence of screen scoring idioms which has yet to be more thoroughly investigated in existing scholarship.

Concentric Layers of Stylistic Referentiality

A curious relationship exists between *Final Fantasy VII* (hereafter *FF7*), its *Remake*, and both games’ “careful adaptation of filmic practice to the requirements of a new [interactive] medium” (to draw on Tim Summers’ assessment of the original game).¹¹ On one hand, the original *FF7*’s channelling of certain scoring conventions associated with the Golden Age of classical Hollywood¹²—whether in its leitmotivic structures,¹³ memorable character and location themes, or its use of music to establish continuity/unity—has been widely interpreted as an attempt to imbue its ambitious science-fiction narrative with

8. Collins, *Game Sound*, 82–84; Kyle Worrall, “Remaking Music for Modern Sensibilities: A Case Study in Music Design and Implementation Across Generations from *Final Fantasy VII* to *Final Fantasy VII Remake*” (paper presented at the 8th Annual North American Conference on Video Game Music, online, June 13, 2021), accessed October 1, 2023, <https://youtu.be/eiowL4BPDYU>.

9. See Elkington, “Film,” 344; Sadoff, “Scoring for Film and Video Games.”

10. Andrew S. Powell, “The Musical Butterfly Effect in *Until Dawn*,” *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 1, no. 4 (2020): 22–23.

11. Tim Summers, *Understanding Video Game Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 159.

12. See Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: BFI Pub; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 70–98; Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 66–110.

13. Throughout this article, I employ the terms “leitmotif” and “leitmotivic” solely as they are used in discussions on the classical Hollywood score and its subsequent revival in the mid/late-1970s. This is quite distinct from the way that leitmotifs are typically understood in the context of nineteenth-century symphonic music and Wagnerian opera. For more on this distinction, see the subsection of this article titled “Fragmented and ‘Cinematized’ Uematsu”.

a correspondingly cinematic player experience.¹⁴ On the other hand, *Remake* is a game which strives to simulate the sights and sonority of contemporary cinema and, at the same time, channel the narrative and sonic identity of the original *FF7*'s video game medium. It is in this way that *Remake* boasts concentric layers of stylistic referentiality: by adopting a recognizably cinematic idiom, the soundtrack for *Remake* extensively flaunts its quotation of pre-existing *game* music—Uematsu's original score for *FF7*—within which we can clearly identify other scoring techniques that, in themselves, initially conveyed an impression of the cinematic. *Remake* thus presents us with a unique and highly atypical example, while also elucidating other aspects of the complex relationship between film and game music. The game's soundtrack necessarily channels and distils both impetuses with an acute awareness of the form it is working within, and in a way that vibrantly foregrounds the strengths of both. For this reason, studying *Remake* and its many concessions to the cinematic “promise” of video games can afford us new insights on these co-existing musical identities, without challenging ludomusicology's prevailing stance on the necessity to consider game music for its own distinct properties.

Aims and Anticipated Outcomes

This article argues that the success of *Remake*'s musical score might be attributed to its deft navigation of and dual-reliance on (i) cultivating the impression of the cinematic, towards which many contemporary “Triple A” games aspire, and (ii) its concurrent efforts to communicate aspects of its original identity as a 1997 video game which, in itself, employed scoring tropes from classical Hollywood.¹⁵ A complex dialogue thus emerges between the scores for both *FF7* and its *Remake*. Unlike other recent remakes, in which it has become common for the source material's original soundtrack to be made directly accessible as DLC or as part of an alternative mode of play,¹⁶ *Remake* harnesses the pre-existing music it incorporates in a highly integrated way, vibrantly illustrating a complex convergence of scoring idioms from both game and film music traditions. In particular, I hope to illustrate aspects of *Remake*'s prominent aesthetic of adaptation,¹⁷ as

14. Here, I am not referring to the idea of an in-game “cinematic” or cutscene (i.e., a non-interactive scripted animation), but rather to the term's semiotically loaded invocation of quite general ideas concerning narrative development, duration, and scale, often alongside expectations for appropriately “epic music and sound design.” See Rich Newman, *Cinematic Game Secrets for Creative Directors and Producers: Inspired Techniques from Industry Legends* (Burlington: Focal Press, 2013), xii.

15. Uematsu has discussed his attempts to harness aspects of Hollywood film music in his game soundtracks: on the release of his soundtrack for *Final Fantasy VIII* (1999), the composer said that it would have been quite unusual if that game's score did not incorporate elements drawn from Hollywood screen scoring. He also admitted to his lack of expertise in this area, noting the challenges he often faces in attempting to compose in this way. Nobuo Uematsu, “Special Interview,” interview by Yoshitake Maeda, liner notes for *Final Fantasy VIII Original Soundtrack Limited Edition*, SquareSoft SSCX-10028, 1999.

16. For example, see *Resident Evil 2*. Capcom. 2019. PAL/English, PC; *The Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition*, Lucasfilm Games. 2009; *Pokémon HeartGold Version* and *Pokémon SoulSilver Version*, Game Freak 2010. PAL/English, Nintendo DS.

17. This is an idiom that can be identified in numerous adaptations, spinoffs, and remakes. Elsewhere, I have explored how the soundtracks for TV adaptations such as *Westworld* (2016–22), *Watchmen* (2019), and *Wednesday* (2022–) employ eclectic compilation scores of reworked pre-existing music, in apparent attempts to reinforce their similarly reflexive aesthetics of adaptation. For example, see James Denis Mc Glynn, “The Adaptation of Narrative

well as its frequent recourse to the trope of the selectively-withheld musical quotation. This is employed at many key points throughout *Remake*'s narrative: although the game's score is notable for its fragmentation and reinterpretation of the original *FF7*'s music, such fragments often culminate with the inclusion of an elaborate, extended rendition that is most faithful to Uematsu's original track and its initial arrangement/synthesized instrumentation from 1997. Numerous online commentators, such as Alex Moukala, have noted the impactful effect of such selectively withheld quotations:

With the Jenova boss theme in *Remake*, "Quickening," it starts with a certain *Dark Souls* vibe: this grandiose, dark, brooding, orchestral track [...] people tended to not like it, because "JENOVA" is a theme that we all remember for the arpeggios, but most especially for the four-on-the-floor kick [drum]. In "JENOVA-Quickening," in the first phase there's no kick, there's no electronic arpeggio. In the second phase, as soon as you hear the kick and the arpeggios, the memories start to float back like crazy. And that's where every streamer lost their mind, because of the kick and the arpeggios, so that's how powerful instruments can be, and they know it, and they use them specifically in key moments to create certain emotions.¹⁸

As Moukala's description of the track "JENOVA-Quickening" highlights, this trope recurs throughout *Remake*, right into the game's final stages. In the interest of concision, I have largely limited my analyses to examples from the first two of *Remake*'s gameplay chapters, especially given how effectively these qualities are illustrated in the game's earliest reinterpretations of music from the original *FF7* and the extent to which these phenomena persist throughout *Remake*'s eighteen gameplay chapters. These include: the game's introductory sequence and its accompanying theme, "Opening-Bombing Mission," retained in *Remake* as important kernels of the original game's filmic and game identities alike; Uematsu's random encounter theme for *FF7*, "Fighting,"¹⁹ which is frequently fragmented and reworked to conform with *Remake*'s overhauled battle mechanics and leitmotivic scoring; and the boss encounter theme "Still More Fighting"²⁰ which, as in the 1997 game, is not heard in full until the Airbuster boss battle. Ultimately, this article seeks to elucidate the mutualistic relationship between *FF7* and its *Remake* which, in line with prevailing models in adaptation studies, reveals much about the dialogic relationship between contemporary game and film scoring idioms.

and Musical Source Material in HBO's *Watchmen* (2019)," in *After Midnight: Watchmen After Watchmen*, ed. Drew Morton (Jackson: University Press Of Mississippi, 2022), 200.

18. Alex Moukala. Interview with Richard Anatone, James Denis Mc Glynn, and Andrew S. Powell, May 14, 2022.

19. This well-known battle theme has been alternately translated into English as "Those Who Fight," and "Let the Battles Begin!"

20. As with the random encounter theme, the boss cue for *FF7* has been lent alternative titles in English: "Those Who Fight Further," and "Fight On!"

An Overdue Overview

I'm just glad Square Enix is so forward-thinking with the composers that they have on their teams: not only the main composers, but also the arrangers, like Shotaro Shima, who did so many tracks in *Remake* and figured out how to blend the stylistic worlds of Hollywood and JRPGs, in a way that doesn't lose the Japanese identity, but also sounds like a fricking movie.²¹

Despite the frequency with which comparisons between film and video games are invoked in both game studies and ludomusicology, surprisingly little scholarly work has attended to our discipline's longstanding dual-engagement with both film and video game music approaches in a more general sense, or explored how this focus may impact upon our study of game music. Much of the existing body of scholarship comprises more specialised studies that shed light on quite specific aspects of this relationship. For example, Neil Lerner has framed animated films as the "intermediary step" between silent films and video games.²² Other game music studies have drawn comparisons with silent film in similarly nuanced ways,²³ while scholars like Kevin Donnelly, Miguel Mera, and Florian Mundhenke have published in-depth accounts of specific game-to-film adaptations.²⁴ The closest individual scholarly study to consciously direct its attention to my present task is Zach Whalen's 2007 chapter "Film Music vs. Video Game Music: The Case Of *Silent Hill*."²⁵ However, at this point, Whalen's work constitutes an undeniably early study in the development of this field and, while his aspirations are to highlight "critical differences between film and video-game music,"²⁶ his focus nonetheless remains quite firmly on his case study. Before turning my attention towards *Remake*, it is thus important to provide a brief survey of the various ways that scholars of both film and game music have accounted for the interplay of these two distinct scoring idioms.

21. Alex Moukala. Interview with Richard Anatone, James Denis Mc Glynn, and Andrew S. Powell, May 14, 2022.

22. Neil Lerner, "Mario's Dynamic Leaps: Musical Innovations (and the Spectre of Early Cinema) in *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros.*," in *Music in Video Games: Studying Play*, ed. K.J. Donnelly (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1–29.

23. See William Gibbons, "Song and the Transition to 'Part-Talkie' Japanese Role-Playing Games," in *Music in the Role-Playing Game: Heroes and Harmonies*, ed. William Gibbons and Steven Reale (New York: Routledge, 2019), 9–20; Dan Golding, "Finding *Untitled Goose Game*'s Dynamic Music in the World of Silent Cinema," *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 2, no. 1 (2021): 1–16, accessed September 13, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jsmg.2021.2.1.1>.

24. See Kevin Donnelly, "Emotional Sound Effects and Metal Machine Music: Soundworlds in *Silent Hill* Films and Games," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design and Music in Screen Media*, ed. Liz Greene and Danijela Kulezic-Wilson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 73–88; Miguel Mera, "Invention/Re-Invention," *Music, Sound and the Moving Image* 3, no. 1 (2009): 1–20; Florian Mundhenke, "Resourceful Frames and Sensory Functions – Musical Transformations from Game to Film in *Silent Hill*," in *Music and Game: Perspectives on a Popular Alliance*, ed. Peter Moormann (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2013), 107–24.

25. Zach Whalen, "Case Study: Film Music vs. Video Game Music: The Case Of *Silent Hill*," in *Music, Sound and Multimedia*, ed. Jamie Sexton (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 68–82.

26. Whalen, "Film Music vs. Video Game Music," 69.

A Fallacious Comparison?

Just as film music scholar Royal S. Brown firmly asserts that film music be treated as “an art apart from mainstream classical music,”²⁷ so too is the case routinely made that game music be considered separately to film music, and that film music is *not* always the logical lens through which we might account for game music’s form, functionality and style. As Fritsch and Summers adroitly note, “we must be wary of suggesting that films and games can be treated identically, even when they seem most similar.”²⁸ Of course, as noted earlier, this is not to say that existing game music scholars have not made valuable use of theories and concepts arising from film music scholarship and media studies. There is a general agreement among ludomusicologists that film and TV might be seen as the “nearest siblings” of video games, and that analyses of video game music might fruitfully adopt many methodologies and ideas from the fields of TV and film musicology as a result.²⁹ Recent game music scholarship has incorporated numerous methodologies and analytical models for which there is a well-established precedent in contemporary film music scholarship, such as neo-Riemannian theory.³⁰ So too have ludomusicologists looked towards eclectic aspects of interdisciplinary media scholarship to account for live performances of video game music and their associated fan cultures.³¹ Yet, there has nonetheless been a tangible move in recent literature to better recognize that “the trajectory within games of the current decade has been away from a slavish emulation of the cinematic and towards the evolution of visual storytelling techniques that establish a unique mode, distinct from cinema—or more precisely, distinct from mainstream Hollywood.”³²

While many existing comparisons of game and film music have been informed by latent assumptions concerning symphonic screen scoring’s influence on game composers, other commentators have made compelling cases for a more mutualistic relationship existing between the two idioms which has resulted in the emergence of a screen scoring idiom that is quite separate from that of Hollywood cinema. Ron Sadoff offers valuable industry-informed insights into contemporary production practices and resultant musical/stylistic changes in both film and game music. He illustrates how a profound cross-pollination of eclectic compositional styles has emerged as the result of recent

27. R. S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 49.

28. Melanie Fritsch and Tim Summers, “Part III Analytical Approaches to Video Game Music - Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Video Game Music*, ed. Melanie Fritsch and Tim Summers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 132.

29. Steven Reale, “Analytical Traditions and Game Music: *Super Mario Galaxy* as a Case Study,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Video Game Music*, eds. Melanie Fritsch and Tim Summers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 193.

30. Richard Anaton, “*Kishōtenketsu* as Leitmotif: Storytelling and Musical Meaning in the Main Theme to *Final Fantasy VII*,” *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 4, no. 4 (2023); Reale, “Analytical Traditions and Game Music,” 210–18.

31. Stefan Xavier Greenfield-Casas, “Video Games Alive: Ludic Liveness and Playful Listening in Video Game Music Concerts,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Video Game Music and Sound*, ed. William Gibbons and Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

32. Brooker, “Camera-Eye, CG-Eye: Videogames and the ‘Cinematic,’” 126–27.

advancements in digital technologies and the resultant non-linear, modular workflow shared by contemporary game audio and film music production practices.³³ Crucially, Sadoff specifies that, although the prevalent idiom that dominates contemporary AAA games is indeed a symphonic one, the developments and production contexts outlined above have resulted in a scoring style that is quite distinct from that of classical Hollywood:

Although the symphony orchestra remains the primary scoring vehicle for blockbuster films and “Triple A” games, the frequent inclusion of synthesized timbres and popular music syntax suggests an essential shift in aesthetic perspective.³⁴

Here, Sadoff frames the dominant scoring idiom in contemporary film and video game music as being more indebted to popular music and to what he and Sergi Casanelles have identified as the so-called *hyperorchestral* sonority of contemporary entertainment media.³⁵ According to Casanelles, hyperorchestration is a scoring trend that has emerged as a result of collaborative scoring processes, popular music impetuses, and a frequent blending of virtual/live instruments and signal processing. This has given rise to a symphonic compositional idiom that is “divested of a sound aesthetic modelled on the concert hall”³⁶ and, according to Casanelles and Sadoff, far closer to a “subset of sound design.”³⁷ This distinction is important here, especially given the considerable impact that this scoring idiom has borne upon contemporary understandings of what constitutes “cinematic” music. While at one point impressions of what we might deem cinematic scoring would have been unambiguously ascribed to the likes of Williams, Goldsmith, and the harmonic language of classical Hollywood to which those composers’ scores are so conspicuously indebted, contemporary associations of cinematic music have decidedly evolved to encompass the hyperorchestration techniques deployed by composers like Hans Zimmer, James Newton-Howard, Harry Gregson-Williams, and many other artists associated with film scoring production companies like Remote Control Productions.

Other scholars have made related observations that give credence to Sadoff and Casanelles’ framing of this scoring idiom’s growing ubiquity. For example, James Cook describes how technological developments have manifested themselves in game music through the number of sounds in game composers’ arsenals, hinting at the same sort of sonorities described by Casanelles and Sadoff in their references to hyperorchestration.³⁸

33. Sadoff, “Scoring for Film and Video Games,” 663. For more on the ties between digitization and changes in screen scoring workflows, see James Buhler, *Theories of the Soundtrack* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 260.

34. Sadoff, “Scoring for Film and Video Games,” 677–78.

35. Casanelles’ doctoral project comprised a dissertation-length exploration of the hyperorchestra as a “virtual musical ensemble.” See Sergi Casanelles, “The Hyperorchestra: A Study of a Virtual Ensemble in Film Music that Transcends Reality” (PhD diss., NYU Steinhardt, 2015); “Mixing as a Hyperorchestration Tool,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design and Music in Screen Media*, ed. Liz Greene and Danijela Kulezic-Wilson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 57–72.

36. Sadoff, “Scoring for Film and Video Games,” 674; see also Buhler, *Theories of the Soundtrack*, 271.

37. Casanelles, “Mixing as a Hyperorchestration Tool,” 62.

38. James Cook, “Game Music and History,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Video Game Music*, ed. Melanie Fritsch and Tim Summers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 344.

Given the concentric stylistic impetuses that inform *Remake*'s soundtrack, as well as the manner in which so many of *Remake*'s rearrangements of Uematsu's music conform with these descriptions of hyperorchestration—an idiom that has been contrastingly identified by Nicholas Reyland in his description of corporate classicism,³⁹ and elsewhere associated with such cinematic phenomena as the so-called impact or chaos cinema aesthetics⁴⁰—it should be clear how *Remake*'s vast and varied soundtrack might serve to elucidate facets of these converging styles and production practices.⁴¹ However, unlike in Reyland's model, where “the leitmotif withers, and music recedes to basic functions of providing ‘pace’ and underscoring gesture and affect,”⁴² it will soon become clear that *Remake* does not abandon the leitmotivic forms associated with the classical Hollywood score. Quite the contrary: *Remake*'s score is equally defined by its dense fragmenting and repurposing of extensive material penned by Uematsu (a phenomenon explored in the final sections of this article), serving as further evidence of the idiosyncratic intersection of stylistic impetuses that inform the game's soundtrack.

Notwithstanding Sadoff's deft navigation of video game and film music idioms' mutualistic relationship, it is still routinely asserted that video game music is much more closely “modeled on its filmic counterpart” than this evidence clearly suggests.⁴³ This conflation is commonplace: as Summers notes, it is all too easy to paint a “reductive picture” of video game music that fails to acknowledge its status as a separate medium to film, merely concluding that “games simply [become] incrementally ‘more cinematic’ over time.”⁴⁴ This stance wholly ignores many other cultural, technological and stylistic impetuses that affected game music's inception,⁴⁵ and is thus frequently warned against in existing writing on game music. However, despite this, there is conversely an inevitable consensus regarding game music's most obvious point of divergence from scoring in other forms of screen media: that is, its necessary adaptive status, whereby it must “answer to the demands of a dynamic, nonlinear medium.”⁴⁶ This is undeniably foremost amongst the medium-specific properties to which game music must attend. The most common way that adaptive music is achieved in game scoring comprises both horizontal re-sequencing and vertical layering, whereby game music modules are sequenced and

39. Nicholas Reyland, “Corporate Classicism and the Metaphysical Style: Affects, Effects, and Contexts of Two Recent Trends in Screen Scoring,” *Music, Sound and the Moving Image* 9, no. 2 (2015): 115–30. For a terse account of Reyland's concept, see Buhler, *Theories of the Soundtrack*, 281.

40. Geoff King, *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000); Matthias Stork, “Chaos Cinema Part 1,” Vimeo, 2013, accessed September 13, 2023, <http://vimeo.com/28016047>.

41. One example from *Remake*'s soundtrack which neatly conforms with this idiom is the cue, “Under Cover of Smoke” (track 39 of *Remake*'s soundtrack, from 0:31), especially given the track's rapid and repetitive string *ostinati*, vast *fff* synth bass blasts and driving percussion.

42. Buhler, *Theories of the Soundtrack*, 281; see also Janet Halfyard, “Cue the Big Theme? The Sound of the Superhero,” in *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, ed. John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman, and Carol Vernallis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 171–93.

43. Sadoff, “Scoring for Film and Video Games,” 663.

44. Summers, *Understanding Video Game Music*, 143.

45. For example, see William Gibbons, “Blip, Bloop, Bach? Some Uses of Classical Music on the Nintendo Entertainment System,” *Music and the Moving Image* 2, no. 1 (2009): 40–52.

46. Sadoff, “Scoring for Film and Video Games,” 663.

overlayed to adapt to gameplay.⁴⁷ EA audio director Paul Gorman playfully likens this latter “vertical” approach to the creation of orchestration “food groups,” whereby multiple layers of harmonically consonant material of equivalent duration and tempi are faded between one another to reflect changes in states of play, by contrast with the sudden shifts between layers that he dubs “flipping.”⁴⁸ Audio directors are thus empowered with a “freedom to mix and superimpose the layers that would reflect a succession of events likely to occur in the course of gameplay,” such that “a variety of adaptive mixtures may be triggered by a player’s progression within a scene.”⁴⁹ Video game music’s necessary adaptive properties serve as an invariable point of analysis as we begin to explore games like *Remake* which explicitly strive to harness styles and topics arising in cinema, or inculcate audiences to accept that their game’s musical score is being composed in real-time and unraveling in response to their ludic input.

The interactive drama is perhaps the idiom in which cinematic and video game identities co-exist most conspicuously, and in which developers have necessarily prioritized a fluidity in their adaptive music. Equally, the idiosyncratic gaming experience of the interactive drama—which scholars like Andrew S. Powell argue is a burgeoning form unto itself, distinct from video games⁵⁰—has inspired some of the most valuable scholarship to have mounted similarly comparative analyses of cinema and video games. In his nascent research on interactive dramas, Powell makes a case for how we might most effectively engage in intermedia research concerning the relationship between films, games, and their shared/divergent scoring practices:

Perhaps the goal is not—or should not be—the identification of the dividing line between film and video game, but rather the point(s) of intersection between the two media, finding where influences interlink to create the composite.⁵¹

Although his research concerns this very specific subset of audiovisual media, Powell nonetheless affords us tremendously useful insights into how one might begin to approach game music’s relationship to film music in a useful, meaningful way: certainly, pinpointing the varying ways that recent scholars have identified these points of intersection has been the primary goal of this subsection. However, should we start to direct our attention to *Remake* and the distinctive way in which these points of convergence and divergence manifest themselves in the game’s ambitious original score, we are immediately faced with some pressing issues.

47. Gina Zdanowicz and Spencer Bambrick, *The Game Audio Strategy Guide: A Practical Course* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 309–40.

48. Sadoff, “Scoring for Film and Video Games,” 671–72. It is worth noting that, with the advent of digital cinema (and consonant with Sadoff’s framing of the mutualistic relationship between film and game scoring noted earlier), the task of music editors for film and TV often necessitates processes that are equivalent to the horizontal re-sequencing and vertical layering inherent to middle-ware programming strategies in the composition/implementation of game music.

49. Sadoff, “Scoring for Film and Video Games,” 672.

50. Powell, “The Musical Butterfly Effect in *Until Dawn*,” 43.

51. Powell, 23.

The primary issue is of course that, although *Remake* is an unabashedly narrative-oriented game, the outcome of its central plot is, of course, predetermined. Besides interactive dramas, many of the most self-professedly “cinematic” or “story-driven” games, in which audiences are encouraged to believe that the actions of the player-protagonist are hugely consequential, are ultimately fixed experiences, “leading a player through a goal-based sequence of events—flexible in duration and depth through the addition of side quests, additional content, and so on—to a distinct ending.”⁵² Numerous scholars and critics have likened these sorts of AAA games to the “on rails” experience of a fairground ride: scripted amusements which simulate autonomy and progress.⁵³ Of course, given the apparent narrative linearity of a game like *Remake*, any comparison with the sort of “evolving experience” and bifurcating narratives that are characteristic of interactive dramas may seem altogether unfounded. In *Remake*, narrative is no longer a “building block of the experience” which can be reordered and transformed in response to players’ decisions, but rather a one-way pulley along which the player is drawn, as they choose to either engage with or ignore the game’s many (non-linear) RPG elements.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, given the extensive and highly ambitious use of adaptative music that can be observed in *Remake* (often during conspicuously non-linear moments, such as combat sequences), the game’s score engages many of the same debates concerning issues of stylistic convergence and “cinematic” designations as Powell’s investigations into interactive dramas.

Exploring the various ways that scholars have discussed screen scoring for both video games and films affords us many insights when undertaking an analysis of an unambiguously story-driven action RPG like *Remake*, especially given the extent to which both game and film music idioms coalesce as part of the game’s idiosyncratic musical identity and are foregrounded as a result of their interaction. Equally, just as both the video game and cinematic impetuses informing *Remake*’s score are made conspicuous through their co-existence, so too is their interaction foregrounded because of the musical material’s pre-existence and the way that Uematsu’s music is adapted to conform to the demands of this new medium. This is of course an inevitable consequence of the game’s status as a “remake” (notwithstanding its many playful attempts to challenge our expectations for such reimaginations) and the complex nexus of intertextual concerns that this generates, as the following section explores.

Pre-Existing Music: Remakes and Video Game Remakes

Naturally enough, the use of pre-existing music from an antecedent work in a remake or adaptation of that work is commonplace in both Hollywood film and video

52. Powell, 27.

53. The British humorist and game journalist Ben “Yahtzee” Croshaw coins a whimsically reductive moniker, the “Ghost Train Ride,” for such “cinematic linear adventure games” as *Marvel’s Guardians of the Galaxy* (2021), *Tomb Raider* (2013) and *The Last Of Us* (2013). Will Brooker uses the same fairground attraction analogy, describing how the formative “interactive movies” of the mid-2000s often “[led] to an ‘on-rails’ experience like a theme-park ride, rather than a convincing simulation.” See Brooker, “Camera-Eye, CG-Eye,” 127; Ben Croshaw, “It’s Time to Coin a New Term for Cinematic Linear Adventure Games | Extra Punctuation,” November 25, 2021, accessed September 13, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCKZsyZ7B5U>.

54. Powell, 22.

games.⁵⁵ Given Uematsu’s music is so inextricably tied to the identity of the original *FF7*, the fact that *Remake*’s vast collaborative soundtrack should rely so closely on the themes of the original game’s soundtrack should come as no real surprise. However, it is important to reassert that *Remake* is by no means a straightforward retelling of the original *FF7*’s narrative, such that even the inclusion of “Remake” in its subtitle feels like a playful, self-reflexive gesture.⁵⁶ This is an essential distinction, especially given the quite different aspirations that have historically informed game remakes and their counterparts in Hollywood cinema. While in the context of Hollywood film the term “remake” might, at its simplest, be said to denote films that “tell a story again that has been told before, in the same modality in which it has been told before,”⁵⁷ interpretations of what we mean by the term “remake” are in fact many and varied.⁵⁸ John Biguenet radically expands our possible understanding of the term: by his reckoning, we might also understand micro-level allusions to famous characters, shots, and scenes as “the briefest form of ‘remaking.’”⁵⁹

The aspirations of game remakes are generally quite different and, arguably, much simpler than those of cinema. To formulate a broad teleological definition, one might suggest that often the aim of the game remake—as distinct from that of the film remake—is simply to take an existing product and recreate it in a way that is visually and technically appealing for a new generation with different standards for technical achievement (in terms of gameplay, graphics, music, narrative . . .). In many contexts, this merely involves creating a 1:1 recreation using the enhanced technology and game engine of a current console,⁶⁰ often leading to AAA developers being criticized for attempting to “mine [a past] era for titles and profit.”⁶¹ In other cases, unlike in film, a game remake need *not* be recreated in the same “modality” as before (a defining quality of the

55. See Jonathan Godsall, “Präexistente Musik als Autorensignatur in den Filmen Martin Scorseses,” in *Martin Scorsese: Die Die Musikalität der Bilder*, ed. Guido Heldt, Tarek Krohn, Peter Moormann, and Willem Strank (Munich: edition text+kritik, 2015), 19.

56. Rachele Alexis Cates Joplin aptly frames the game as “a cunning meta-narrative, a dynamic look at what a ‘re-make’ can be in a media space, and a palimpsestuous space where hyperaware characters actively break through audience walls.” See Joplin, “Memoria: A Rhetorical Analysis of Sticking to and Spreading from JRPGs and Their Fandoms” (PhD diss., University of Houston, 2022), 67–68.

57. Björn Bohnenkamp et al., “When Does It Make Sense to Do It Again? An Empirical Investigation of Contingency Factors of Movie Remakes,” *Journal of Cultural Economics* 39, no. 1 (2015): 16.

58. Given the widely contrasting understandings of what the term “remake” denotes in the context of Hollywood cinema, I have frequently invoked the notion of “musical remaking” in my research on rearrangements of pre-existing music in screen media as a blanket term for the many distinct forms that musical adaptation can take. Worrall likewise gives preference to the term “remaking” in his descriptions of how pre-existing music has been harnessed in recent video game remakes, given its consistency with how “the experience as a whole is being remade.” See James Denis Mc Glynn, “The Transient Composer: Rearrangement of Pre-Existing Music in the Film Score” (PhD diss., University College Cork, 2020), 3–6; Worrall, “Remaking Music for Modern Sensibilities.”

59. John Biguenet, “Double Takes: The Role of Allusion in Cinema,” in *Play It Again, Sam: Retakes on Remakes*, ed. Andrew Horton and Stuart Y. McDougal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 132.

60. *Shadow of the Colossus* (Bluepoint Games, 2018), *Demon’s Souls* (Bluepoint Games, 2021) and *The Last Of Us Part I* (Naughty Dog, 2022) are all examples of such 1:1 remakes. This phenomenon is quite distinct from the trend of *remastering* existing titles (by way of improving graphics, sound quality, etc.), as in the case of *Dark Souls Remastered* (Bandai Namco, 2018) and *The Last of Us Remastered* (Naughty Dog, 2014).

61. Indira Neill Hoch, “Nostalgia for the New: Video Game ‘Remakes’ and the Limits of Reflection” (paper presented at the 21st Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers, online, October 27–31, 2020).

definition of the film remake, as Bohnenkamp et al. argue), nor need it even tell the same story. To illustrate this, Jordan Stokes uses the useful metaphor of a palimpsest: a term which, in manuscript studies, describes parchment from which text has been effaced, yet upon which one can discern both the present and past inscription at once. Given the term's rich "metaphorical afterlife, usually in contexts where we are dealing with some kind of incomplete erasure, or some notion of double-vision," Stokes argues that idea of a palimpsest works well in the context of game remakes, especially when "if you know the original, you're never not aware that you are playing a remake of a game. There is something that was erased, and some new thing was given in its place [...] we are left with this curious sense of double-vision, where we play both versions of the game at once."⁶²

To this point, *Final Fantasy VII Remake* could not be a more pertinent example: the game has generated extensive commentary due to its frequent reflexive hinting at the possibility of altering the plot of the original 1997 game in subsequent instalments, even introducing hitherto unseen spectral entities called "Whispers" as apparent "arbiters of fate," luring the player to question whether what they are indeed playing a direct remake or a more reflexive reinterpretation of the original narrative. It is even implied in *Remake* and the game's paratexts that particular characters may be somehow aware of the events of the original story, as though it had already occurred and that they are, like the player, experiencing the curious sense of double-vision described by Stokes. Players are thus invited to reappraise *Remake's* timeline as being a peculiarly non-linear and acausal entry in the wider *FF7* transmedia universe. In this way, *Remake's* conspicuously reflexive approach to retelling the story of *FF7* neatly epitomises the destabilizing effect with which Catherine Belsey characterizes the so-called *interrogative text*, and the way that such works deny audiences their "fantasy of stable mastery over what they perceive within [the text]," as summarised by Elsie Walker:

The interrogative text is designed to deliberately disconcert its audience beyond their expectations. The interrogative text discourages easy identification of final truths, singular statements, or authorial intentions [...]. Where the classic realist text tends to "hide" its own mechanisms, the interrogative text tends to lay its own construction bare.⁶³

Remake thus straddles a unique balance between its highly cinematized remaking of the original, and a far more reflexive, interrogative form of reinterpretation. What is more, given how the remade game explicitly destabilises audiences' understanding of the

62. Jordan Stokes, "Link's Awakening for the Nintendo Switch: A Taxonomy of Musical Palimpsests" (paper presented at the 9th Annual North American Conference on Video Game Music, Louisiana Tech University School of Music and online, April 3, 2022). This research paper will form the basis of Stokes' forthcoming chapter in *Adaptation, Rearrangement, and Music Across Screen Media*, ed. Kate Galloway, Katherine Reed, and Reba Wissner (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

63. Elsie Walker, "Hearing the Silences (as Well as the Music) in Michael Haneke's Films," *Music and the Moving Image* 3, no. 3 (2010): 15, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.5406/musimovimag3.3.0015>; see also Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Routledge, 2003).

original *FF7* narrative,⁶⁴ it also evinces central tenets of adaptation studies which dictate that, by virtue of being adapted, the earlier work is itself irrevocably transformed in turn. Understanding *Remake*'s adaptation of its source material in this way is equally useful to us as prospective analysts of the game's musical score. Should we view the game's music in the context of *Remake*'s playfully reflexive, interrogative approach to remaking, it becomes far easier to untangle the *Remake* soundtrack's dense mesh of melodic fragments and allusions, playful cover versions, complex reorchestrations and even diegetic performances of material from the original game. Of course, the game's soundtrack entails many of the more standard concessions to contemporary sensibilities and modernity that one might expect of a current-generation remake, consonant with Stokes' definition of *consummations* in soundtracks for video game remakes: contemporary recreations which closely conform with the instrumentation, tessitura, arrangement and sonority that the antecedent (usually synthesized) game music it adapts had originally sought to simulate.⁶⁵

How then, does such a highly anticipated remake as that of *FF7* so successfully navigate the creative challenge of adapting a beloved work to such widespread popular appeal, while simultaneously taking such creative liberties and risks? How does the score simultaneously pander to the cinematic promise of video games, while all the while reflexively foregrounding the game's status as an adaptation of a pre-existing work? Keeping in mind the rebelliously reflexive way that *Remake* plays upon our existing expectations for what a video game "remake" can and should constitute, the final section of this article looks at several representative examples from *Remake*'s opening gameplay, where the way that Uematsu's music is remade to conform with these dual-expectations is very clear. I will illustrate how the same musical material is used to serve very different ludic and narrative ends, and yet confoundingly facilitates key "beats" of the original *FF7* player experience, notwithstanding the extent of its transformation.

TEXTUAL OBSERVATIONS

Citing Video Game Sonorities

Remake's musical dual-reliance on both film and game scoring idioms is most obvious where it directly imports the sonorities of the original game's synthesized instruments as part of its reflexive and conspicuously adaptive aesthetic. This decision is by no means unique to *Remake* and prominently recurs across many current-generation adaptations: Jordan Stokes describes how Nagamatsu's score for the recent remake of *Link's Awakening* (Nintendo, 2019) takes music and sounds from the original Gameboy soundtrack (Nintendo, 1993) and "splices them into the newly constructed version [...] in all [their] glorious 8-bit crudity, appearing as [samples] within the lushly organic soundscape of an eighth-generation console game." Consistent with his underpinning palimpsest

64. See Rachele Alexis Cates Joplin, "Memoria," 67–75.

65. Stokes, "*Link's Awakening* for the Nintendo Switch." It is important to clarify that, by using the term "consummation," Stokes does not imply that any distinctions in quality or technical achievement exist between the music of the original *Link's Awakening* and its remake. Rather, he solely uses the term to characterize current-generation remakes' realization of once-synthesized instrumentation via recorded performances.

heuristic, Stokes hints at the possible aesthetic effects that this *mélange* can elicit in the context of a reflexive reimagining like *Link's Awakening*:

It's as if we suddenly remember that the [...] visuals and the lush orchestral sonic palette are a skin, hovering on the surface of the older game, and now that sonic skin has ripped and we hear a voice from out of the depths.⁶⁶

Remake is populated with numerous examples that are remarkably consistent with Stokes' description of this phenomenon. For example, the heavily reverberated anvil sample which prominently characterized the B-section of Uematsu's "Fighting!" is similarly heard in *Remake's* many iterations of that same battle theme.⁶⁷ Elsewhere, the synthesized arpeggio flourish that prefigured the original game's title card during its opening cinematic is likewise retained in *Remake*, conspicuous as a result of the otherwise "consummated" symphonic arrangement in which it is encased.⁶⁸ Perhaps the example which most corresponds with Stokes' description of synthesized sonorities residing under a newly-orchestrated "skin" is *Remake's* rendering of Uematsu's "Prelude."⁶⁹ Reworked as "The Prelude-Reunion," this track could initially be interpreted as a straightforward consummation of the track as it appeared in *FF7*: just as in the original, the piece's looped form centres around three successive variations of a simple arpeggiated chord progression, and is heard in an approximation of the instrumentation and orchestration that its synthesized forerunner strove to evoke. Notably however, the track's sonority is buttressed by a synthesized mirror of its distinctive arpeggios which sound in unison beneath the recorded harp performance, thus creating an uncanny admixture of the performed and the sampled. This clear effort to simultaneously communicate both the sonority of the synthesized 1997 "Prelude" and the instrumentation it strove to simulate suggests that, in *Remake* at least, aspects of this music's original status as video game music may be more central to its core identity than the cinematic qualities that the original game's synth instruments sought to emulate.

William Cheng's discussion of the various symphonic reinterpretations of the opera from *Final Fantasy VI* (Square, 1994) further supports this claim. According to Cheng, early game audio's abstraction of real-world performed music and the necessary processes of "compositional and aural imagination" that this abstraction imposed on a given game's composer and players were inherent facets of the music's aesthetic appeal. Players fell in love with the music "on its own terms: not for what it could or would one day become."⁷⁰ Furthermore, he argues that these aesthetic properties endure as reasons for early game music's appeal and that, consequently, such qualities are often lost in the process of symphonic rearrangement:

66. Stokes, "Link's Awakening for the Nintendo Switch."

67. This sample can be heard on the track "Let the Battles Begin!—A Merc's Job" (track 24 of the soundtrack's official release) at 00:24.

68. This can be heard on the track "Midgar, City of Mako" (track 2 of the official soundtrack release) at 3:36.

69. "The Prelude-Reunion" (track 1 of the official soundtrack).

70. William Cheng, *Sound Play: Video Games and the Musical Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 90. Emphasis added.

Today’s concert adaptations of early game music dispel the need for illusion by bridging the gap between virtual and real performing forces. These musical realizations obviate the exercises in compositional and aural imagination that were so prominently at play in the production and reception of early game audio.⁷¹

Cheng’s account is remarkably relevant to the necessary dual-aspirations of *Remake* to channel both film and game identities in its many remakes of Uematsu’s pre-existing compositions. The manner in which *Remake* navigates this harnessing of both orchestrated sonorities and consciously derivative synth sounds (as “The Prelude–Reunion” so compellingly illustrates) is evidence that *Remake*’s developers were acutely aware of the inherent appeal of audiences’ exercising their “compositional and aural imagination,” as well as the necessity for their game to both appease this demand and fulfil the cinematic promise towards which contemporary AAA releases so often aspire.

Fragmented and “Cinematized” Uematsu

While these palimpsestic relationships shed much light on the interaction of game and film music in *Remake*, this flux is equally palpable in other ways from the game’s outset. *Remake*’s opening cinematic markedly elaborates upon its PS1 counterpart and, functionally, becomes much closer to an extended prologue sequence than its ancestor: players are introduced to various aspects of life in Midgar—its distinctive cityscape, its eight encircling Mako reactors, its young citizens at play in public parks—as the game’s first act is visually contextualized in manner absent from the 1997 game. The whole sequence is through-scored with a lush symphonic composition that heavily draws on Uematsu’s music, especially “One-Winged Angel” and his “Main Theme of *Final Fantasy VII*” (Example 1).

Perhaps less explicitly, this introductory cue also incorporates an ascending stepwise seventh movement (Example 1, measure 3) that strongly evokes Uematsu’s “Shinra, Inc.” theme (Example 2).



EXAMPLE 1. “Midgar, City of Mako” from *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (from 1:13–1:26).



EXAMPLE 2. “Shinra, Inc.” from *Final Fantasy VII*.

71. Cheng, *Sound Play*, 90.

With its explicit leitmotivic repurposing of Uematsu's pre-existing game music, this introductory sequence provides audiences with a first insight into the prominently co-existing film and game music impetuses informing *Remake's* score. The way that fragments of Uematsu's themes form the compositional basis for the accompanying musical cue—titled “Midgar, City of Mako”—closely conforms with the compressed leitmotivic approach that was often adopted by film composers during the Golden Age of classical Hollywood: an approach which, to the ears of its detractors, “simply [took] the signifying function of the leitmotif at face value,”⁷² prioritized communication of semantic content over thematic development⁷³ and famously provoked vitriolic criticism from the cultural theorists Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler in *Composing for the Films*.⁷⁴ Beyond this shared approach to leitmotif, “Midgar, City of Mako” is also scored in the unmistakably hyperorchestral idiom described by Sadoff in his account on the recent convergence of game and film music production practices.⁷⁵ Furthermore, its orchestration's heavy reliance on chromatic harmony and ambiguous cadential passages (see Example 1, measures 3–4) further underpin the music's strong impression of symphonic Hollywood screen scoring and its harmonic conventions, as an ascending variation on Uematsu's “Shinra, Inc.” theme is prominently curtailed by a sudden C#° chord. This is exceptionally reminiscent of the handful of shorter, fixed-duration cutscene cues from Uematsu's original *FF7* soundtrack which, in themselves, were audibly indebted to screen scoring idioms originating in the classical Hollywood score. One memorable example from the original game is Uematsu's cue “Countdown,” which is only heard during the cutscene where the Shinra No. 26 spacecraft takes flight from Rocket Town. With its rapid introductory string *ostinati*, short fifty-second duration, and similarly ambiguous cadential conclusion (Example 3, measures 2–3), the debts of Uematsu's original score to equivalent conventions of classical Hollywood screen scoring are unambiguous. As in “Midgar, City of Mako,” the cue “Countdown” similarly cuts short a fragmented iteration of another recognizable motif (from “Cid's Theme”) by way of a *fermata* upon a diminished chord at the uppermost note of its ascending melody (Example 3).⁷⁶

Given the clear aspirations of “Midgar, City of Mako” to communicate the pre-existing video game identity of *FF7* (alongside its obvious concessions to the cinematic promise of game scoring, especially by way of the hyperorchestration techniques identified by Casanelles and Sadoff), and considering how the original *FF7* soundtrack audibly channeled elements associated with classical Hollywood film music, *Remake's* curiously

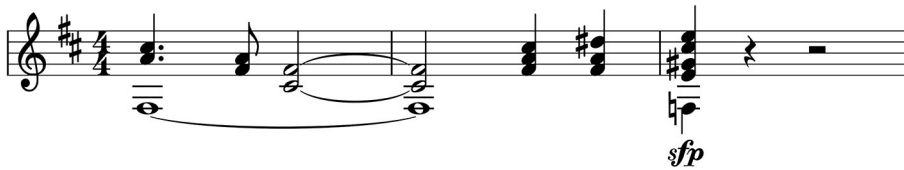
72. James Buhler, “*Star Wars*, Music, and Myth,” in *Music and Cinema*, ed. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 33–57.

73. Buhler, “*Star Wars*, Music, and Myth,” 53; see also James Buhler, *Theories of the Soundtrack* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 279.

74. Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947); see also Alex Ross, *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 574.

75. Sadoff, “Scoring for Film and Video Games.”

76. Uematsu reuses this precise idiom (i.e., curtailing a memorable melody at the top of its stepwise arc) elsewhere in his soundtrack for *Final Fantasy VII*, e.g., in the cue “Steal the Tiny Bronco!” at approximately 0:35.



EXAMPLE 3. “Countdown” from *Final Fantasy VII* (from 0:35–0:41).

concentric levels of stylistic referentiality are exceptionally foregrounded in even these first short moments of the game’s introductory cinematic.

The dense mesh of motivic fragments that make up “Midgar, City of Mako” eventually gives way to what initially sounds to be a straightforward symphonic performance of Uematsu’s “Opening” for *FF7* (or, to revisit Stokes’ terminology, a faithful consummation of that music). This decision to faithfully approximate Uematsu’s implied instrumentation at this point is perhaps unsurprising, especially given how synonymous the associated cutscene, its memorable close-up of the character Aerith and the ensuing “dolly shot” through Midgar’s cityscape have become with the original *FF7*’s opening moments. However, this explicit reference to the original game’s “Opening–Bombing Mission” cue is short-lived, as its memorable descending melody is looped, reharmonized in an implied E minor tonality, and alternates between individual measures taken from the choral section of Uematsu’s “One-Winged Angel” (Example 4).

On one hand, this curious creative decision might be explicated by highlighting one of *Remake*’s more surreptitious sonic debts to its source material: in the opening moments of the original game’s introductory cinematic, before players hear the first sustained string notes of “Opening–Bombing Mission,” audiences are previewed to surreal imagery of a starry night sky accompanied by swirls of sound design and ambient rumbles, amid which an astute listener can clearly discern fragments of the Latin choral music of “One-Winged Angel” (itself a choral setting of the *Carmina Burana*). *Remake*’s score audibly draws on this subtle thread of the original game’s sonic identity which, although innocuous, nonetheless forms the basis of the ambient sound design heard in the original *FF7*’s first moments. Equally, while this track is clearly inspired by textures and musical material heard in the original 1997 game, *Remake*’s continuous push-pull of cinematic and game influences is no less palpable in the fragmented melodic quotation transcribed in Example 4: the combined fragments of “One-Winged Angel” and Uematsu’s “Opening” are themselves reharmonized (measures 2–5) to create an implied variation on the so-called Tarnhelm progression (i–♭vi⁶), where the expected diatonic ♭VI chord is further condensed to form a C minor diminished chord (i–♭vi^o). Although originating in opera rather than film (the motif is so named for its use in Wagner’s *Ring* cycle to signify an object of great power and malevolence), the Tarnhelm progression would later accrue what Bribitzer-Stull describes as a “remarkable commonality of connotation throughout the late nineteenth century, frequently evoking the sinister, the eerie, and the eldritch,” before finding a natural home and garnering an “iconic role” in the music of science-fiction and fantasy film scores during the classical-Hollywood revival of the mid-to-late

SATB choir ("One Winged Angel" fragments)

Es - tuans in - ter - ius

Cello ("Opening," repeated and fragmented)

Es - tuans in - ter - ius Es - tuans in - ter - ius Ir - a ve - he - men - ti

Es - tuans in - ter - ius Ir - a ve - he - men - ti

EXAMPLE 4. "Midgar City of Mako" from *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (from 2:24–2:50).

1970s.⁷⁷ Harmonic decisions such as this, which are commonplace throughout *Remake*'s elaborate orchestral score, are representative of the style topic of pantriadic harmony that is so central to Hollywood film scoring and which, as Frank Lehman notes, has been conspicuously "used throughout film history to represent and sometimes elicit the affect of wonderment," otherness and, as in this case, the villainy of an antagonist.⁷⁸ Furthermore, it is interesting to note that this precise progression has special significance in *FF7*: Richard Anatone argues that, throughout Uematsu's music for the original game, the

77. Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, *Understanding the Leitmotif: From Wagner to Hollywood Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 133–34; see also Scott Murphy, "Transformational Theory and the Analysis of Film Music," in *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies*, ed. David Neumeier (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 487.

78. Frank Lehman, *Hollywood Harmony: Musical Wonder and the Sound of Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 10.

Tarnhelm progression functionally serves as a more significant character motif for the game’s protagonist Cloud Strife than the “Main Theme of *Final Fantasy VII*,” which is more typically associated with that character.⁷⁹

By alternating between Uematsu’s “Opening” for *FF7* and this corrupted, cinematized iteration of its villain’s theme, this very short excerpt from “Midgar, City of Mako” provides further cogent evidence of the *Remake* soundtrack’s dual-reliance on both video game and cinematic antecedents: a phenomenon which persists throughout the soundtrack. Such conspicuous and concentric layers of stylistic referentiality may once again be untangled with reference to Stokes’ deft analysis of *Link’s Awakening*, in which he memorably suggests that we might map uses of pre-existing music in game remakes onto a pair of (heuristic) axes, measuring (i) fidelity, in either sound and/or spirit, (ii) modernity, in sound and/or spirit. Stokes concludes that “the soundtracks of remakes engage in this complicated dance with both novelty and fidelity, both sonic and spiritual.”⁸⁰ The nature of *Remake*’s continual stylistic flux may well be interpreted as a similar dance, within which we might also measure its appeasement of *FF7*’s (iii) video game, and (iv) cinematic antecedents.

As the above examples attest, *Remake* sets an early precedent for its soundtrack’s elaborate leitmotivic forms—that is to say, the “compressed or condensed leitmotif structure, unique to film scoring,” adapted by classical Hollywood composers from nineteenth-century opera⁸¹—with its score engaging in this highly fluid fragmentation and recombination of existing themes by Uematsu in a fashion that is quite distinct from anything that the original soundtrack set out to achieve. Although Uematsu’s propensity for memorable character and location themes are often spoken about with reference to the leitmotif’s capacity to “[give] continuity to extended forms” through rich networks of referentiality,⁸² in truth the original PlayStation game’s implementation of Uematsu’s music rarely strove to simulate the sort of fleeting, closely synched transformations for which leitmotifs were employed in the context of classical Hollywood film scores, save perhaps in the game’s handful of fixed-duration cutscenes mentioned earlier, e.g., the 1997 soundtrack’s cues “Mako Cannon–The Destruction of Shinra,” “Steal the Tiny Bronco!,” and “Countdown” (see Example 3). In the 1997 game, thematicism thus functions in a manner that is quite distinct, being wholly tailored to the medium it served: character themes are often simply looped and reused in relevant contexts, exactly as they were heard before, occasionally with a single variation: “Cid’s Theme” has its melancholic “Launching a Dream Into Space” variant, while for “Red XIII’s Theme” there is “The Great Warrior.” With the benefit of recent technological developments, current-generation approaches to adaptive music, and the enormous AAA budget behind *Remake*, it might be argued that this new game elaborates upon the leitmotivic fragmentation and recombination that the original *FF7* clearly channeled, yet which it ultimately strove to simulate rather than formally realize.

79. Richard Anatone, “*Kishōtenketsu* as Leitmotif.”

80. Stokes, “*Link’s Awakening* for the Nintendo Switch.”

81. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 99.

82. Ross, *Wagnerism*, 35–36.

Trombone (“Main Theme” fragments) Fr. Horn

Piano

Trumpet

Strings

The image displays three systems of musical notation. The first system contains staves for Trombone and French Horn, with a Piano part below them. The second system contains staves for Trumpet and Piano. The third system contains staves for Strings. The Piano part in all systems features prominent triplet patterns. The Trombone and Trumpet parts show fragments of a melodic line, while the Strings part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with triplets.

EXAMPLE 5. Fragments of Uematsu’s “Main Theme of *Final Fantasy VII*” heard quoted in the brass parts for the cue “Bombing Mission” in *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (from 2:40–2:54).

Of course, it would be unreasonable to attempt to enumerate the leitmotivic networks that exist throughout *Remake*’s soundtrack: melodic, harmonic and rhythmic allusions to Uematsu’s music recur and are recontextualized in the game at almost every turn. Perhaps unsurprisingly, his “Main Theme of *Final Fantasy VII*” is most regularly subject to this treatment. In *Remake*’s reworking of Uematsu’s “Bombing Mission” for example, the memorable major seventh ascent of “Main Theme” is heard in three sequential variations across its trombone, French horn and trumpet parts (Example 5).

While these varied approaches to thematic transformation are revelatory when considering *Remake*’s delicate “dance” of cinematic and video game impetuses, ultimately the many recent developments in adaptive audio play a huge role in enabling *Remake*’s use of leitmotif to function so effectively in the video game medium, and in a manner much closer to its earlier use in symphonic Hollywood film scoring styles. This is perhaps best exemplified in the way that Uematsu’s battle themes are reimplemented to conform with the demands of *Remake*’s entirely overhauled action RPG gameplay: a quality that is especially apparent during the game’s opening chapter, as this article’s final textual analyses explore. As the following section reveals, *Remake*’s harnessing of cinematic

scoring idioms in its (temporally indeterminate) combat sequences counts among the game’s defining musical features, if not serving as its most ambitious technical achievement.

Adaptive Music and the Cinematic Leitmotif in Games

It was perhaps inevitable that *Remake* was to innovate in its use of adaptive music,⁸³ especially given its distinctive action RPG combat system and the even greater sense of indeterminacy that it generates when compared with its turn-based precursor. In the original game, combat is entirely detached from overworld navigation and is separated from other gameplay by a complete fade-to-black and a hard cut between location music and battle music. By contrast, combat is not segregated as a separate phase in *Remake*; rather, gameplay is continuous. *Remake* is thus reliant on the “vertical” approach to implementing adaptive music (or “flipping,” as Paul Gorman calls it), whereby differing game states are reflected by the soundtrack fading between harmonically consonant variations of differing intensities.⁸⁴ It is interesting then that adaptive music—itsself an almost expected facet of contemporary AAA titles—is the very thing that enables the game’s effective co-option of leitmotivic conventions from Hollywood film music. However, *Remake*’s implementation of fluid in-game shifts to battle is not so simple as “flipping” the track, especially when one of the original *FF7*’s defining features was its numerous and varied area themes. Consequently, *Remake*’s soundtrack necessarily comprises a great number of “battle edits” of its many unique location themes, in order to effectively maintain this level of continuous adaptive music. Given these cues’ concurrent debts to both the original game and *Remake*’s aspirations to maintain its continuous flow of elaborately orchestrated underscore, many of these battle edits provide us with a valuable insight into the converging cinematic and video game identities which most characterize its score.⁸⁵

Remake’s use of Uematsu’s cue “Mako Reactor” is one notable example. In the original game’s opening gameplay, Cloud’s first battles are accompanied by the unbroken loop of “Bombing Mission,” with no musical distinction between battle and navigation states. This eventually changes when the player arrives at Mako Reactor No. 1—the target of the eco-terrorist group AVALANCHE’s titular bombing mission—whereupon the music shifts to the location theme of the same name (Example 6).

When players engage in random encounters *inside* the reactor, the music abruptly shifts to the game’s primary battle music “Fighting!” for the first time, thus establishing

83. Throughout this section, I use the term “adaptive music” to denote any music “that reacts to the game’s state,” as per Karen Collins’ influential definition of adaptive audio. See Collins, *Game Sound*, 4.

84. See Sadoff, “Scoring for Film and Video Games,” 672.

85. A similar interplay of cinematic and video game (specifically JRPG) identities famously characterizes the *Kingdom Hearts* games, in which characters, locations and musical material from Disney films and Square Enix video games coexist as part of a shared continuity. What’s more, Ryan Thompson notes how the *Kingdom Hearts* series, like *Final Fantasy VII Remake*, serves as a valuable example of how revisions of earlier titles can be scored, as remasters/remakes accrue an increasingly central presence in the gaming industry. See Ryan Thompson, “A Far-Off Memory: *Kingdom Hearts III* and Musical Reuse,” in *The Intersection of Animation, Video Games, and Music*, ed. Lisa Scoggin and Dana Plank (New York: Routledge, 2023), 161.



EXAMPLE 6. “Mako Reactor” from *Final Fantasy VII*.

EXAMPLE 7. “Mako Reactor–Battle Edit” from *Final Fantasy VII Remake* excerpt (from 0:16–0:24).

the usual musical convention for random battles that will persist throughout the rest of the game. In *Remake*, it is interesting to note how the player’s musical experience of this first half-hour of *FF7*’s gameplay is largely retained, yet without compromising its underlying cinematic aspirations. As in the original, Uematsu’s “Bombing Mission” theme is heard during the opening moments of *Remake*’s gameplay and continues unchanged throughout Cloud’s first battles with Shinra operatives. Likewise, when Cloud enters Mako Reactor #1, the music shifts to a relatively faithful rendering of Uematsu’s “Mako Reactor” theme from the original game (see Example 6), with its synthesized lead melody curiously displaced by a low string iteration. It is when Cloud engages in combat inside the reactor that the first notable change takes place, as the location theme “flips” into its battle edit, titled “Mako Reactor 1–Battle Edit” on the official soundtrack release. Yet, despite this desire for continuity and fluidity in the *Remake*’s orchestrated score, it is interesting to note that the battle edit for “Mako Reactor” rhythmically and melodically quotes “Fighting!” in an apparent effort to retain the original game’s battle theme and its first occurrence as an important kernel of players’ musical experience of *FF7* (Example 7).

As the above transcription illustrates, the percussion for “Mako Reactor 1–Battle Edit” centres around the prominent “double tresillo” rhythm that is so characteristic of Uematsu’s original “Fighting!” battle theme,⁸⁶ this time heard beneath the “Mako Reactor”

86. Andrew S. Powell has described the long history of this rhythmic pattern’s use—in both video game and film scores—to accompany combat sequences, “often [connoting] a duel, drawing from antecedents of Western film music topoi and later action films.” Furthermore, there is a seemingly special precedent for this figure’s use in JRPGs like *Final Fantasy*, as in Masayoshi Soken’s battle theme “Find the Flame” for the series’ most recent instalment *Final Fantasy XVI* (Square Enix, 2023) for example. See Andrew S. Powell, “A Matter of Time: Reality and Fantasy

melody. A trumpet counter-melody is likewise based around this repeated rhythm.⁸⁷ At one point during the reactor raid, a rendering of “Fighting!” is heard that *is* much closer to Uematsu’s original (titled “Let the Battles Begin!–Ex-SOLDIER”), yet this iteration is still heavily adapted, with its introduction abridged and reharmonized by way of a descending chromatic bass figure. In this way, *Remake* postpones the affective power of this popular cue being heard in the instrumentation and spirit implied by Uematsu’s synthesized arrangement in 1997, while concurrently affording this opening gameplay segment the same sense of cinematic and pantriadic flair as its introductory cutscene.⁸⁸

Turning at last to the final moments of the game’s first chapter—where players encounter the game’s first boss antagonist, the Scorpion Sentinel, at the core of Mako Reactor #1—we might identify further evidence of *Remake*’s simultaneous “cinematization” of *FF7*, within which one can likewise perceive its concentric layers of referentiality to the original game’s identity. The accompanying cue, “Scorpion Sentinel,”⁸⁹ is unambiguous in its harnessing of the cinematic screen scoring idioms discussed throughout this article: its style is consistent with the contemporary cinematic scoring idiom described by Reyland in his discussion of so-called “corporate classicism,” with the enemy’s presence being announced by earth-shattering “hammer blows of percussion, [which] help marshal the dramatic and musical rhythms into an appropriately epic expressive register.”⁹⁰ Equally, its heavily produced style is reminiscent of the hyper-orchestration techniques described by Casanelles and Sadoff, which Cook suggests have been co-opted as a central facet of game composers’ arsenal. The track—which is heard in three successive and increasingly intense battle edits as the player progresses through the encounter—also boasts numerous chromatic modulations and other concessions to the pantriadic harmonic structures that we’ve said are characteristic of classical Hollywood screen scoring.

Yet, as noted earlier, these debts to symphonic Hollywood film music are made especially conspicuous by virtue of the pre-existence of the musical material being adapted: tracks that are inextricable from *FF7*’s original identity as a fifth-generation game. In the 1997 game, it is Uematsu’s “Bombing Mission” theme which plays throughout the encounter with the equivalent boss. Here however, throughout the battle’s first two phases, *Remake*’s score fragments and recombines two-measure phrases from Uematsu’s boss battle theme for *FF7*, “Still More Fighting!”, in much the same way that the location theme “Mako Reactor” is imbued with material from the random encounter cue “Fighting!”. The opening of the first phase’s battle edit rapidly alternates between repeated two-measure fragments from the first and third phrases from Uematsu’s original (Example 8 and 9; heard between 0:08 and 0:19 in “Scorpion Sentinel”).

through Metrical Analysis in Contemporary Hollywood Film,” in *Music Analysis and Film: Studying the Score*, ed. Frank Lehman (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

87. “Mako Reactor 1–Battle Edit” is track 6 on the official *Remake* soundtrack release. The transcribed excerpt can be heard at 0:17.

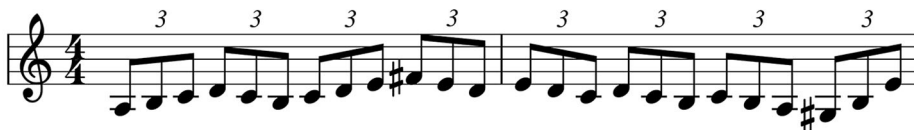
88. “Let the Battles Begin!–Ex-SOLDIER” is track 4 on the game’s soundtrack release.

89. “Scorpion Sentinel” is track 7 on the official *Final Fantasy VII Remake* OST release.

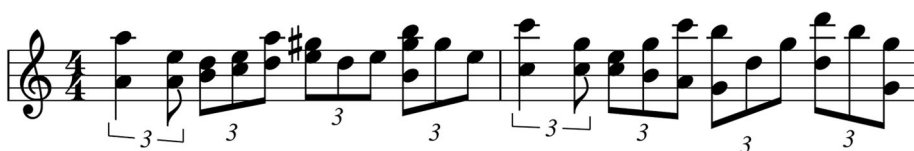
90. Reyland, “Corporate Classicism and the Metaphysical Style,” 116.



EXAMPLE 8. Excerpt from Phrase 1 of Uematsu's "Still More Fighting!"



EXAMPLE 9. Excerpt from Phrase 3 of Uematsu's "Still More Fighting!"



EXAMPLE 10. Excerpt from Phrase 2 of "Still More Fighting!"

Soon thereafter, the music pivots into the memorably triumphant second phrase of "Still More Fighting!" (Example 10; quoted at 0:37–0:49 in "Scorpion Sentinel") which, having been repositioned and selectively withheld until this later point in the rearrangement, is all the more impactful, underpinned with new staccato choral vocalisations (which recur throughout many of *Remake's* boss encounter themes) and stepwise low brass movements.

All the while, the music concurrently evokes Uematsu's standard "Fighting!" battle music, with prominent orchestral stabs in a 3–3–2 cross-rhythm serving as a contraction of the double tresillo pattern that was so characteristic of that original theme.⁹¹

Given the meticulous and elaborate way that *Remake's* score fragments and repurposes Uematsu's music to conform with both contemporary screen scoring tropes and leitmotivic forms, this disorienting reordering of "Still More Fighting!" serves as subtle evidence of *Remake's* conscious retention of aesthetics and musico-narrative structures from the original game. As noted above, in the original *FF7* it was "Bombing Mission" that accompanied the first boss battle. *Remake* honors this antecedent and reprises "Bombing Mission" during the second of the encounter's three battle edits, seamlessly interweaving the cue with the stepwise melody from third phrase of Uematsu's boss music (transcribed in Example 9).⁹² The ascending melody from the second phrase of "Bombing Mission" is also prominently featured (Example 11).

91. This section of "Scorpion Sentinel" can be heard at 4:08.

92. This can be heard at 2:42 in "Scorpion Sentinel," track 7 of the *Remake* soundtrack.



EXAMPLE 11. Ascending melody in “Bombing Mission” from *Final Fantasy VII*.

This melody is repeated three times in “Scorpion Sentinel,” being transposed upwards by a minor third on each occasion, reminiscent of the first chord progression for “Still More Fighting!” (Am to Cm in the latter; here, Ebm to Gbm to Am).⁹³ This admixture ultimately results in a tempered rendering of the music that was originally heard during the first boss battle in *FF7* (“Bombing Mission”) housed within a defamiliarized iteration of “Still More Fighting!” which, in the original game, players do not hear until the Airbuster boss encounter much later in their playthrough. The music thus comprises what is essentially a symphonic fantasia on the boss and battle themes from Uematsu’s 1997 soundtrack.⁹⁴ In this way, by selectively withholding a more faithful arrangement of “Still More Fighting!”, *Remake* manages to retain the impact of this track’s first appearance as a key musico-narrative “beat” during the Airbuster battle. The closest that *Remake*’s “Scorpion Sentinel” track comes to replicating the sonority and instrumentation of “Still More Fighting!” arrives in the battle’s final stage and, even here, we are denied a full iteration: after a momentary echo of the “Main Theme of *Final Fantasy VII*,” we hear a seemingly faithful recreation of the track’s famously distorted guitar riff (see Example 8), but it is unfinished, condensed as a result of the new 7/4 meter in which it is encased.⁹⁵

In this way, notwithstanding the new cinematic demands of both *Remake*’s gameplay and its current-generation reinterpretation of *FF7*, the game’s soundtrack succeeds in rendering this first boss battle suitably climactic, while also withholding the original narrative significance and musical experience of hearing “Still More Fighting!” for the first time in its original location (at which point, players hear the track in an extended progressive rock arrangement that meticulously replicates that of the original game’s soundtrack). Much of *Remake*’s sprawling score largely conforms to this flux between faithfully recreating and withholding musical material from the original game: irrespective of its new medium and presentation, this frenetic dance of cinematic and video game impetuses which shape *Remake* continues to inform its curious hybrid identity throughout the game’s roughly fifty-hour playtime.

CONCLUSION

By exploring *Remake*’s musical and sonic debts to Uematsu’s score for *FF7*, this article has attempted to chart the game’s various concessions to evoke (i) the music’s original

93. This occurs at approximately 3:48 in the track “Scorpion Sentinel.”

94. “The Airbuster” is track 56 on *Remake*’s official soundtrack release.

95. This can be heard at 6:12 in the track “Scorpion Sentinel.”

video game identity, and (ii) a more typically symphonic idiom, evocative of scoring trends in both classical Hollywood and contemporary entertainment media. These curiously co-existing impetuses are especially evident in the way that *Remake* blends elements of the original PlayStation’s synthesized sonorities with its symphonic renderings of Uematsu’s music and the game’s clear stylistic and harmonic debts to Hollywood scoring conventions, consistent with the aspirations of current-generation AAA titles to fulfil a well-established “cinematic promise” in video game experiences. With many of the sonorities and leitmotivic structures cited in *Remake* having been utilized (or at least simulated) in the original game to communicate aspects of the cinematic, I have framed *Remake*’s idiosyncratic musical identity with reference to its seemingly concentric levels of stylistic referentiality. I also saw the case of *Remake* as a valuable opportunity to investigate other aspects of music and sound in games, including: existing literature on the relationship between film and video game music; the role of pre-existing music in video game remakes (which, more than before, employ reflexive and interrogative approaches to their sources); and recent developments in adaptive game audio.

Of course, given the sheer scale of *Remake*’s ambitious soundtrack, it would be quite impossible to engage in anything resembling a comprehensive survey of the game’s musical influences in one research article. My analyses have largely been limited to the game’s symphonic cues which, although reflective of the score’s predominant style (and perhaps the most useful one to explore when considering the intersection of film and game scoring idioms in *Remake*), do not reveal the exceptional diversity of the soundtrack. For example, I have not focused on the electronic music of *Remake*, whether in its audibly drum-and-bass influenced cues such as “Speed Demon” or the flagrant EDM of “The Most Muscular.”

The overwhelming sense of stylistic diversity exhibited throughout *Remake*’s enormous soundtrack forcibly reaffirms Richard Leppert’s description of the video game medium’s characteristic sense of excess (“visually, sonically, narratively”): a quality he describes with reference to the film *Moulin Rouge* (2001) and the equivalent sense of density and sensory resplendence characteristic of Baz Luhrmann’s filmography.⁹⁶ Indeed, an analogy with Luhrmann’s visual and sonic excesses certainly helps us to explicate the bustle of locations like Wall Market or the Sector 7 Slums as they are depicted in *Remake*, as well as the sense of reflexivity that I have continually aligned with *Remake*’s adaptation of its source material. As I hope to have illustrated throughout this article, *Remake* flaunts its status as a remake and adaptation as a central facet of its identity. Furthermore, I maintain that *Remake*’s overwhelming sense of stylistic density, reflexivity, and self-referentiality—qualities which are regularly foregrounded by the game’s use of adaptive music and reinventions of themes by Uematsu—are indispensable facets of the game’s success, serving as a strong reminder that any assessment of remakes should appropriately recognize the status of all adaptations as a “a plural ‘stereophony of echoes, citations, [and] references.’”⁹⁷ ■

96. Richard Leppert, foreword to *Sound Play: Video Games and the Musical Imagination*, by William Cheng (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), xiv.

97. Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O’Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 6; see also Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 160.

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