

Exploring Ivalice Through Music:  
An Examination of Music, Landscape, and Classical Etymology in *Final Fantasy XII*

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Music in video games forges such a strong connection between players and fictional worlds that gamers are willing to purchase official soundtracks and visit concerts dedicated solely to game music, such as Video Games Live and Distant Worlds: The Music of *Final Fantasy*. Throughout video game history, the role of music in games has grown to such an extent that soundtracks written for symphony orchestra (rather than a single keyboard) are seamlessly integrated with characters and on-screen graphics.<sup>1</sup> As Simon Wood notes, “the connection between game music and music for film...[is] a constant trope” for gamers and composers alike; however, this connection is not unfounded, as films and video games both rely on “audience members”/gamers to enter a fictional world, or diegesis.<sup>2</sup>

Karen Collins notes that music “plays a significant role in the immersive quality of a game” and that, if the music is interrupted or absent, gamers do not feel as physically present within the game world.<sup>3</sup> Although she also mentions the contention amongst scholars regarding immersion in video games,<sup>4</sup> it would seem that video game music plays a key role in making various areas come alive for gamers. Collins suggests that “symbols and *leitmotifs* are often used to assist the player in identifying...environments”,<sup>5</sup> though orchestration can also assist in creating a sense of a particular place, such as the serene countryside. This paper seeks to examine the connection between the soundtrack of role-playing game *Final Fantasy XIII* and in-game landscapes to identify the ways in which the score suggests divergent landscapes by drawing on earlier techniques in classical and film music traditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Cerrati, “Video Game Music: Where It Came From, How It Is Being Used Today, and Where It Is Heading Tomorrow,” *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law* 8, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 333, accessed May 5, 2014, *Lexis-Nexis*.

<sup>2</sup> Simon Wood, “High Scores: Making Sense of Music and Video Games,” in *Sound and Music in Film and Digital Media: An Overview*, eds. Graeme Harper, Ruth Doughty, and Jochen Eisentraut (New York: Continuum, 2009), 130.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Collins, *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 134.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

Video game players' opinions on and connections to landscape are influenced by music through what Collins describes as "mood induction", which is the "communication of emotional meaning" to players through elements such as tempo and, this author would argue, density of musical texture, instrumentation, melody and harmony as well.<sup>6</sup> A player in *Final Fantasy XII*, for instance, will understandably feel different emotions when traversing the bright, sunny landscape of the Dalmasca Estersand and navigating the dense sandstorms of the Dalmasca Westersand.

That is not to say that landscape associations are included in all video game soundtracks. As Collins states, the genre to which a video game belongs – whether one-person shooter, role-playing (RPG), puzzle, etc. – has a significant impact on the music.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the study of video game scores is still a developing field, so the scoring conventions of the various video game genres have not yet been thoroughly examined. There is a significant difference, however, between the extensive landscape references in *Final Fantasy XII* discussed below and the score for the crime-solving game *The Testament of Sherlock Holmes* (Atlus, 2012). Whereas the former includes separate tracks for nearly all of its areas, the latter features generic pieces to establish mood (e.g. searching for clues, Holmes is in danger) which are identical across such diverse landscapes as Holmes' flat, a morgue in Whitechapel, and a judge's home in London.

Both Collins and Jesper Kaae note that some games, such as *Super Mario Bros.*,<sup>8</sup> adapt or vary music based on player's actions within the game, which Kaae describes as "the ability of the music to react to the game-play".<sup>9</sup> In *Final Fantasy X* (SquareSoft, 2002), for instance, as

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<sup>6</sup> Collins, *Game Sound*, 133.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 139. Collins notes how, in *Super Mario Bros.*, the tempo increases gradually as the amount of time remaining on the game's clock decreases.

<sup>9</sup> Jesper Kaae, "Theoretical Approaches to Composing Dynamic Music for Video Games," in *From Pac-Man to Pop Music: Interactive Audio in Games and New Media*, ed. Karen Collins (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008), 84.

soon as the player encounters a monster, the image on the screen shatters and the characters assume battle positions. Likewise, the music instantly shifts from a landscape-based theme (such as the laid-back music for Besaid Island) to the faster-paced battle theme.

On the contrary, *Final Fantasy XII*'s gameplay is heavily dominated by what Wood terms “ambient pieces”, tracks which establish “a general emotional response or sense of place” for the player as long as he or she remains in a particular area.<sup>10</sup> There are only a few moments in which different tracks overlap or respond to what the player is doing in real time, most notably the short theme which plays whenever a character reaches a new level.<sup>11</sup> The player is clearly aware of his/her transition into a new area in *Final Fantasy XII* not only because the screen turns black momentarily, but also because the theme of the old area fades out and music of the new area fades in. The screen remains black for a few seconds after the new theme appears; therefore, the player has an opportunity to develop landscape associations prior to seeing the actual landscape of any area. In this game, variability of music is not used to reflect player's actions in real time, but then again, the landscapes of the various areas do not change appreciably or at all throughout the game (e.g. it is always daytime in outdoor areas such as the Cerobi Steppe regardless of when characters visit).<sup>12</sup>

Representations of and connections to various landscapes have been pervasive in orchestral and chamber music for several hundred years, as evidenced by such popular pieces as Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* concerti and Beethoven's Symphony no. 6 (“Pastoral”), as well as less well-known pieces, such as Ravel's score for the ballet *Daphnis et Chloé*, which owes much to

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<sup>10</sup> Wood, “High Scores,” 131-2.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 133. The level-up theme would be classified as an “event-triggered episode” in Wood's categories of video game music.

<sup>12</sup> See Collins, *Game Sound*, 125 for a discussion of the Kokiri Forest in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, which has music when players visit during the daytime, but lacks music during the nighttime. *Final Fantasy XII* has no such variability, as the Giza Plains have the same musical accompaniment regardless of whether players visit during the Dry or the Rain.

the Greek pastoral tradition.<sup>13</sup> It would stand to reason, therefore, that after the debut of the symphony orchestra on video game soundtracks in 2000,<sup>14</sup> video game composers have had access to a larger range of timbres and greater orchestration possibilities in order to bring landscapes to life for players.

*Final Fantasy XII* (Square Enix, 2006) follows an orphan named Vaan, his friend Penelo, sky pirates Fran and Balthier, Princess Ashe of Dalmasca, and Basch, a disgraced captain in the Dalmascan army, as they attempt to diffuse a war brewing between two empires, Archadia and Rozarria.<sup>15</sup> A survey of the game's score, which was written by Japanese composer Hitoshi Sakimoto, reveals approximately fifty tracks which are associated with areas of the vast world of Ivalice, many of which share their title with the area they accompany during gameplay.<sup>16</sup> For this paper, certain themes from the soundtrack will be examined in detail, as they have an undeniable connection to the landscapes of *Final Fantasy XII*. By contrast, the three tracks for the Pharos at Ridorana are, at times, at odds with the landscape of the hundred-floor 'lighthouse' they accompany. Finally, consideration will be given to the theme of the Archadian Empire, which thwarts listeners' expectations based on traditional associations of the pastoral with "Arcadia", and one version of the theme which restores the pastoral associations of the mythic Arcadia.

### **Ups and Downs: Preliminary Examples of Literal Representations of Physical Landscapes**

Before moving into a discussion of pastoral, film, and Ancient Greek influences on landscape in *Final Fantasy XII*, this author would like to briefly evaluate the themes for the

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<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey Chew and Owen Jander, "Pastoral," *Grove Music Online*, accessed July 31, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

<sup>14</sup> Cerrati, "Video Game Music," 303.

<sup>15</sup> Hiroshi Minigawa and Hiroyuki Ito, directors, Liner Notes, *Final Fantasy XII*, Square Enix, 2006, video game.

<sup>16</sup> Hitoshi Sakimoto, *Final Fantasy XII Soundtrack Limited Edition*, Aniplex SVWC 7351-4, 2006, four compact discs.

Necrohol of Nabudis and the Great Crystal in the Ancient City of Giruvegan as literal representations of landscapes.<sup>17</sup>

The Necrohol of Nabudis is situated in the former kingdom of Nabradia, which was destroyed during an Archadian invasion two years earlier.<sup>18</sup> Formerly the royal palace, it now stands as a formidable ruin in the middle of the Nabreus Deadlands and is inhabited by creatures called Baknamy, as well as gargoyle-like Elvoretts and reapers called Oversouls. The presence of such a great number of ‘undead’ enemies seems fitting considering that the etymological roots of “Necrohol” are “dead” (necr-) and “whole” (hol) to create a semblance of the palace as “wholly dead”.<sup>19</sup> A notable feature of the landscape is the

uneven floors of the Necrohol which are a direct result of the collapsing corridors and wings of the palace after the explosion of two years before (see



Figure 1). The corridors are therefore tilting

Figure 1. The Necrohol of Nabudis.

dangerously to one side or the other, sagging down or bowing up, or even rendered inaccessible by pools of water.

Sakimoto predominantly uses an unbalanced and, by all accounts, relatively rare time signature, 7/8, for the track which plays when the characters are in the Necrohol of Nabudis. The majority of the track retains this time signature with its lopsided 4 + 3 groupings of notes, which is most noticeable in the constant eighth notes of Sections A and B. Section C, on the other hand, features a tumultuous alternation between 7/8 and 4/4 (see Figure 2 on the following page)

<sup>17</sup> Refer to Appendix for a map of the various locations and areas in *Final Fantasy XII*. This map is provided to players in-game.

<sup>18</sup> *Final Fantasy XII* (Square Enix, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Meaning determined with the aid of Donald M. Ayers, *English Words from Latin and Greek Elements*, 2nd ed. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986).

before transitioning to 3/4 for Section D. As Kaae notes, even though the time signature in Section C changes so often and somewhat unpredictably, the gamer does not feel “that the music is interrupted”.<sup>20</sup> Rather, this



Figure 2. “The Necrohol of Nabudis,” mm. 21-23.

author proposes that the fluctuating time signatures, combined with Sakimoto’s decision to score the majority of the piece in 7/8, reflects (perhaps consciously) the sloping corridors and floors which characterize the landscape of the Necrohol. The unevenness is expressed through the irregular groupings of eighth notes at the opening, which, lacking one eighth note to make traditional groupings of 4 + 4 as in a 4/4 time signature, are reminiscent of the instability of the leaning walls and crumbling floors.

The Great Crystal, a sizeable mass of Nethicite which lies deep within the Ancient City of Giruvegan, is also marked by a theme which captures the features of its landscape. Players must traverse a maze-like series of platforms connected by glowing green pathways within the Great Crystal to reach the dwelling place of the Occuria, Ivalice’s gods.<sup>21</sup> The quest is complicated by the fact that all the platforms look more or less the same, with the exception of gates named after zodiac symbols, which block certain pathways until players touch mechanisms to release them. And to make matters worse, the map of the immediate area is identical for all areas (see Figure 3), except that the marker indicating the player’s

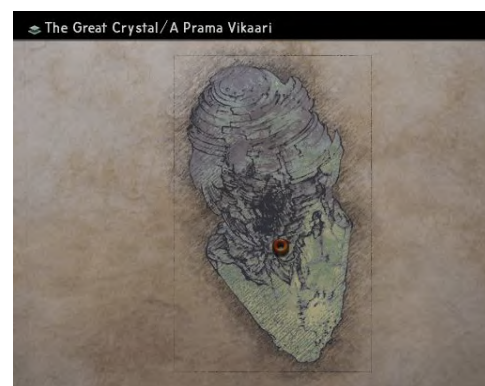


Figure 3. Top: The map of the Great Crystal. Bottom: Great Crystal platform with Way Stone.

<sup>20</sup> Kaae, “Theoretical Approaches to Composing Dynamic Music for Video Games,” 87.

<sup>21</sup> *Final Fantasy XII* (Square Enix, 2006).

location in the crystal advances towards the top of the screen.

Since all platforms and areas of the Great Crystal resemble one another,<sup>22</sup> the lack of variation in the landscape has led players and writers of walkthroughs alike to create detailed sets of instructions and maps of the individual platforms by hand to aid others in navigating the Crystal. Not surprisingly, then, the piano melody introduced in Section A of the Great Crystal theme is cyclical in nature, continually centering around E even though the piece is in D minor (see Figure 4). The arpeggiated harp accompaniment is likewise cyclical, though its constant

eighth-note rhythm and the pattern of each group of six notes (see Figure 4) renders it even more consistent than



Figure 4. "To the Place of the Gods," mm. 5-8.

the melody. The same melody is transposed down the octave in Section B, and after a brief interjection of a harmonically unstable French Horn melody with string accompaniment, Sections A and B return once more, this time with a varied accompaniment (a quarter note followed by a half note, in the case of Section A; B transitions into Section D).

The only real sense of variation from the cyclical melody of Sections A and B comes in Section D, when the cello has a soaring melody with a range that spans a twelfth in four bars. Here the accompaniment is stripped back to sustained string chords which strongly reinforce the key of g minor presented in the cello line. Section D (and, by extension, D'), provide a marked contrast from the melodic material which has preceded it, perhaps representing the few platforms which hold Way Stones or mechanisms for opening various gates. Or could these sections indicate that, like the number and direction (up or down) of pathways extending from a given platform within the Great Crystal, there is some, albeit little, variation in the landscape?

<sup>22</sup> With the exception that the areas grow darker the deeper the characters descend into the crystal. Changes in the level of light are typically brought about by teleportation via Way Stones; see section on the Tomb of Raithwall below.



## Animating the Eerie: Inhospitable Landscapes

As Collins notes, video games provide a greater immersive experience for players when in-game music achieves “the communication of emotional meaning” which a particular place, character, or situation evokes.<sup>23</sup> Video games, however, are not the first medium in which composers have undertaken to bring mysterious, unsettling, and downright eerie landscapes to life. The fifth movement of Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*, for example, takes listeners to “a macabre and turbulent witches’ sabbath” complete with a grotesque version of the once-dreamy *idée fixe* played on the E-flat clarinet, and the novel *col legno* technique in the strings.<sup>24</sup> The music which accompanies the eerie landscapes of *Final Fantasy XII*, including the Tomb of Raithwall and the Feywood, unlike music for other areas (see below), does not rely on one or more unifying melodies to create a sense of place. Rather, orchestration, atonality, and unpredictability are used to evoke the unwelcoming, inhospitable landscapes of these areas.

The Tomb of Raithwall lies far to the west of the game’s starting point, Rabanastre, and, as the name suggests, is the tomb of Princess Ashe’s ancestor, King Raithwall. Though the tomb is allegedly replete with treasure, it is also teeming with monsters, including zombies, vampire bats, and two demon walls which attempt to trap the characters inside. Lit only by the occasional torch (see Figure 5), the Tomb of Raithwall features dark, maze-like rooms connected by long corridors, as well as narrow staircases which lead the characters deep underground. The tomb is

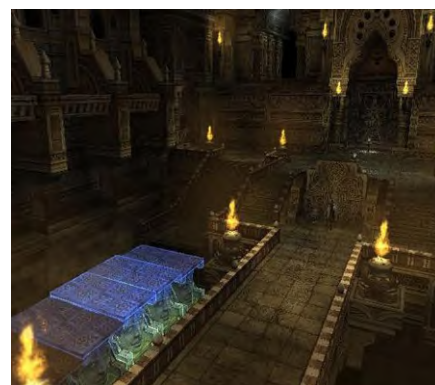


Figure 5. The Tomb of Raithwall.

<sup>23</sup> Collins, *Game Sound*, 133.

<sup>24</sup> Hugh Macdonald, “Berlioz, Hector, §10: Symphonies,” *Grove Music Online*, accessed July 26, 2014, *Oxford Music Online*.

also protected by ancient magicks around which the characters must be cautious; for instance, Balthier warns Vaan about touching mysterious Way Stones, which lead “you know not where”.<sup>25</sup> Needless to say, the landscape is uninviting, and the music reflects this fact.

The track is heavily dependent on percussion instruments including drums, chimes, tubular bells, and a gong which slip in and out quite seamlessly to produce a musical texture which is sometimes thick, sometimes thin with only drums and tubular bells remaining. There is a rather substantial reverberation on all the instruments which is perhaps meant to reflect the echo resulting from the size and depth of some of the rooms in the Tomb of Raithwall. Moreover, sustained, synthesized sounds, which maintain a constant pitch throughout their duration, punctuate the texture and are reminiscent of the ‘screeches’ of creatures evoked by the woodwind instruments in the fifth movement of *Symphonie Fantastique*. Noticeably absent in the Tomb of Raithwall theme, however, are strings, woodwinds, and brass instruments.

In his examination of film music, Hutchings notes that horror films have “a penchant for music that is dissonant, atonal, or in other ways discordant”,<sup>26</sup> such as Bernard Herrmann’s famous score for *Psycho*. Though films and video games are not completely synonymous genres, it would stand to reason that the “association of atonality with experimental or avant-garde music”, which may explain its unnerving quality in horror films,<sup>27</sup> would apply to video gamers as well as film audiences. Although it is impossible to conclude with certainty that horror film scoring conventions influenced Sakimoto’s music for the Tomb of Raithwall, his use of atonal, seemingly unpredictable music and musical texture in this track conform to precedents in the

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<sup>25</sup> *Final Fantasy XII* (Square Enix, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> Peter Hutchings, “Music of the Night: Horror’s Soundtracks,” in *Sound and Music in Film and Digital Media: An Overview*, eds. Graeme Harper, Ruth Doughty, and Jochen Eisentraut (New York: Continuum, 2009), 224.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

film music tradition. He thus succeeds in creating a sense of uneasiness which reflects the inhospitable yet vast landscape of the Tomb of Raithwall.

The music for The Feywood, by contrast, is clearly tonal and uses an expanded orchestral palette, including strings and French Horn, though Sakimoto still makes use of a gong, drums, and chimes, and even adds wordless voices. Although the theme is not atonal and only slightly, but inconsistently, dissonant, is it any less effective in portraying the landscape of The Feywood, an area which one gamer termed “rather creepy”?<sup>28</sup> The A section is, for lack of a better term, a bit bewildering to the listener, as melodic ideas in the French Horns and short ascending vocal phrases suddenly emerge from the driving violin, cello, triangle, and drum accompaniment.

Moreover, the ‘outbursts’ from various instruments, including the strings, French Horn, and gong, continue throughout the piece and suggest the startling manner in which monsters appear in the dense Mist which covers the Feywood when characters run nearby (see Figure 6). If the characters move only a few paces in the opposite direction, however, the monsters



Figure 6. The Feywood.

may vanish once again into the Mist. Thus the music mirrors the volatility in the characters’ surroundings, and the sudden appearance of melodic ideas is unsettling – obviously even more so when a player is interacting with (that is, running through) the landscape.

### **Bliss in the Countryside: The Use of the Pastoral**

Representations of the pastoral and the peacefulness of life in the countryside have been evoked by composers and authors alike, and certain musical elements have such a long-standing association with the pastoral tradition that they have become well-known markers of a

<sup>28</sup> Sky Render, “The Best Intentions Invite the Worst Sort of Trouble. Let’s Play Final Fantasy XII,” The Return of Talking Time, last modified August 8, 2012, <http://www.talking-time.net/showthread.php?p=1368941>.

composer's evocation of the pastoral. As Lee aptly describes, the myth surrounding the bliss of a perfect pastoral setting, Arcadia, lies somewhere between "a Golden Age of innocence, and the troubled present".<sup>29</sup> Lee's description of what this author terms "bliss in the countryside" lends itself well to an examination of musical pastoral elements in *Final Fantasy XII* as Ivalice is a world of the past (hence, mythic).<sup>30</sup> Although many of the areas that players may visit are pastoral in design, the themes for these areas vary with regard to the incorporation of pastoral codes including triple meter, the predominance of woodwind instruments, and the presence of a drone accompaniment which imitates traditional bagpipes.<sup>31</sup>

Eruyt Village, nestled amongst the trees in the dark and menacing depths of the Golmore Jungle (see Appendix for map; see Figure 7), arguably comes the closest to the idealized pastoral landscape of all the areas in *Final Fantasy XII*. This is largely due to the



Figure 7. Eruyt Village.

fact that the village, like the region of Arcadia in Ancient Greece, is "remote and primitive",<sup>32</sup> in that no 'modern' technology (e.g. airships) can be found there. Its inhabitants, the female members of the Viera, are in tune with the wood around them and use natural salves in their working of magicks. Thus, they share a certain "oneness with nature" with the mythic Arcadians,

<sup>29</sup> M. Owen Lee, *Death and Rebirth in Virgil's Arcadia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 36. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* and Hesiod, *Theogony* for the Myth of Ages.

<sup>30</sup> Hiroshi Minigawa and Hiroyuki Ito, *Final Fantasy XII* liner notes.

<sup>31</sup> F. E. Kirby, "Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony as a 'Sinfonia caratteristica,'" *The Musical Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (October 1970): 621, accessed August 1, 2014, *JSTOR*. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/740929>. Kirby discusses such elements in the context of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony, though they are common techniques applied in other orchestral pieces.

<sup>32</sup> Lee, *Death and Rebirth in Virgil's Arcadia*, 33.

a trait which is particularly unique at a time when the humes of Ivalice are seeking to exploit a stone called Magicite to gain power.<sup>33</sup>

The track which accompanies Eruyt Village maintains the association of this area with the pastoral, as the flute melody, which is typically doubled in thirds by another flute in the B section, has an improvisatory quality and seems to float over the harp accompaniment (see Figure 8). The use of the flute corresponds well to the myth that the forest-god Pan taught the Arcadians to play



Figure 8, “Eruyt Village,” mm. 4-9. Note the flute melody (in the treble clef in the piano reduction) over the constant harp accompaniment (bass clef) beginning at Section B.

the flute or panpipe, his own invention;<sup>34</sup> however, there is no evidence in *Final Fantasy XII* to suggest that the Viera play the flute themselves. Nevertheless, the incorporation of the flute, in the A and B sections of the Eruyt Village theme suggests a strong connection to the pastoral landscape of the village. Although it is impossible to know with certainty whether this choice of instrumentation was deliberately used by Sakimoto to evoke the pastoral without knowing whether he was educated in the Western tradition,<sup>35</sup> the idea of the pastoral/idyllic countryside seems to be universal.<sup>36</sup> In any case, the pastoral association is further emphasized by the 6/4 time signature, which is a compound triple meter, as well as the harp arpeggios which underscore the majority of the piece. Though not a traditional drone like the bagpipes, the harp here provides

<sup>33</sup> Lee, *Death and Rebirth in Virgil's Arcadia*, 33; *Final Fantasy XII* (Square Enix, 2006). Male Viera apparently live in another location, thus rendering the village of females similar to the fierce Amazon warriors which are described in Greek mythology.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Regrettably, no online interviews contain this information and there is a general scarcity of information surrounding his training and education. It seems reasonable to assume, however, that Sakimoto was at least somewhat familiar with Western composing practices at the time he wrote the soundtrack for *Final Fantasy XII*.

<sup>36</sup> Chew and Jander, “Pastoral.”

a static harmonic ground by alternating between bass notes E-flat and C-flat major chords (in the A section, for instance) while the melody flows freely above it.

The Cerobi Steppe is characterized by a vast expanse of rolling green plains and hills punctuated by small trees and the occasional wooden bridge over streams. Unlike Eruyt Village, the Cerobi Steppe is uninhabited when the characters pass through, although the old windmills situated in some subareas suggest that it may have been populated in the past. But that is not to say that this area is not connected with the pastoral. As Jones writes, grassy fields and trees are among “the typical foregrounded elements of the bucolic visual field” and thus are suggestive of the idyllic countryside.<sup>37</sup> The presence of the windmills also suggests the nostalgia which so often accompanies urban notions of the countryside and of former, ‘simpler’ times.<sup>38</sup>

The track for the Cerobi Steppe is in triple meter (3/4) and the flute plays an important role with improvisatory melodies in the A, A', D, and E sections. The remaining sections (B, C, and F) are more transitional in nature and feature short, repetitive motives in the strings, harp, and/or celesta (see Figure 9). As in the Eruyt Village theme, it is not surprising to find the flute as a featured instrument



Figure 9. “The Cerobi Steppe,” mm. 1-5.

considering its traditional association with Pan, the “presiding god” of Arcadia, and his panpipes.<sup>39</sup> The flute in the Cerobi Steppe theme deviates from the pastoral code of being doubled in thirds, though the melodic texture is still heavily weighted towards woodwind instruments, as the flute is typically answered by brief ascending/descending clarinet motives.

<sup>37</sup> Frederick Jones, *Virgil's Garden: The Nature of Bucolic Space* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 70.

<sup>38</sup> Chew and Jander, “Pastoral.” One of the more famous accounts of this nostalgia for times past is the Roman author Livy, who in the Preface to his *From the Foundation of the City*, writes: “Then the reader shall follow in his mind the morals as they weaken, then how, more and more, they decayed, then they began to leave (Rome), hurried, until it arrived at these times, in which we are able to endure neither our vices nor the remedies.” *Ab Urbe Condita: Praefatio*, my translation.

<sup>39</sup> Jones, *Virgil's Garden*, 49.

The use of a drone is more conventional and noticeable, as the strings often hold chords for two or more full bars, and provide a pedal tone over which the harmonies change. For instance, a drone F is provided throughout sections A (violins), C and C' (full strings); a similar accompaniment with greater harmonic variation can be found in sections B, A', D, and F. By using the same pastoral motifs as in the Eruyt Village theme in different ways, the Cerobi Steppe is effectively established as part of the idyllic countryside, even though it lies within the borders of the massive Archadian Empire, whose capital city, Archades, is the epitome of anti-pastoral.

### **Thwarting Expectations: Theme of the Archadian Empire**

Though the name Archades is more than a little reminiscent of the mythic Arcadia which “has become the generic name for...all pastoral retreats”,<sup>40</sup> the capital city of the Archadian Empire is anything but pastoral with a theme to match. Far from the mythic Arcadians, who feasted on acorns, pastured sheep, and hunted for food,<sup>41</sup> the Archadians in *Final Fantasy XII* can visit a variety of well-stocked shops and gain access to more elite areas of town by collecting ‘chops’, which are earned by “matching townspeople” to other citizens who have helpful information.<sup>42</sup> The Empire supports the extraction of large quantities of Magicite from mines in Ivalice so that its leading researcher, Dr. Cid, can build weapons to take power from the Occurian gods and put “the reigns of history back in the hands of man”.<sup>43</sup> This would suggest that “the natural world...[is not] ‘a land of dreams’” for the Archadians,<sup>44</sup> but merely a source of raw materials for experiments.

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<sup>40</sup> Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), 18.

<sup>41</sup> Lee, *Death and Rebirth in Virgil's Arcadia*, 33.

<sup>42</sup> Kevin Hall, “Final Fantasy XII FAQ/Walkthrough,” *GameFAQs*, last modified June 27, 2008, <http://www.gamefaqs.com/ps2/459841-final-fantasy-xii/faqs/46240>.

<sup>43</sup> *Final Fantasy XII* (Square Enix, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> Gifford, *Pastoral*, 120.

Moreover, the landscape of Archades is decidedly urban, with small airships as taxis, tall buildings throughout the city, and only a few trees and bushes which seem to be sprouting from rooftop gardens and planters (see Figure 10). There are even streetlights dotting the sides of the cobblestone pathways.



Figure 10. The Imperial City of Archades.

From a distance, the city is positively dotted with buildings, the largest and most impressive of which are the Imperial Palace and Draklor Laboratory. Not surprisingly, then, the Theme of the Empire which plays in Archades features an insistent, upward-moving trumpet fanfare, sometimes doubled by French horn, accompanied by a driving, accented motive in the lower strings and an agitated repeated figure in the violins. At times, the melody is also punctuated by brass accents and, less frequently, the timpani and/or tubular bells emphasize the downbeat (4/4 time). Traditional pastoral motifs such as the predominance of woodwind instruments, triple meter, drones, and undulating melodic figures are clearly lacking in this dense musical texture.

Certainly Archades' role as the Imperial City of the grand Archadian Empire has influenced the pervasive use of victorious-sounding brass fanfares in the Theme of the Empire. Could it also be, however, that Archades' built-up urban landscape is so similar to that of large cities today (such as New York, Hong Kong, and Beijing) that, unlike the pastoral Arcadia of mythology, it holds no "nostalgia to set against...present life"?<sup>45</sup> The B section of the Theme of the Empire seems to support this view of a dismissal of the pastoral and the nostalgia it typically evokes to make way for 'modern' society. Unlike the driving quality of the fanfare and its accompaniment in the A section discussed above, the B section, introduced by gentle chimes features a quaint melody played by the flute and violin or trumpet with an accompaniment comprised of sustained brass notes, harp, and celesta. Though this section of the theme hints at

<sup>45</sup> Gifford, *Pastoral*, 15-16.



the pastoral elements which characterize the themes and landscapes of areas such as the Cerobi Steppe and Eruyt Village, it is quickly dismissed by a crash of the cymbals, reeling violin figures, and the return of the aggressive, accented cello/bass accompaniment which paves the way for the trumpet fanfare of the A section.

The *Final Fantasy XII* soundtrack includes several arrangements of the Theme of the Empire which Sakimoto created for different scenarios throughout the game. Two of the five arrangements (“Dark Night” and “Dark Clouds”) accompany the scheming of Dr. Cid and the emperor’s youngest son (and later, usurper), Vayne Solidor, and, although less intense than the Theme of the Empire, still do not suggest a restoration of the traditional pastoral idealism of mythic Arcadia through a lack of pastoral codes. “Upheaval (Imperial Version)” is faster, more aggressive, and filled with more vitriol than the Theme of the Empire proper, as it is traditionally used for battles with Archadian judges, and “Sorrow (Imperial Version)”, used in scenes where a member of the empire perishes, exploits the traditional association of French horn and strings with death in films.

However, “Cooperation (Imperial Version)”, which is the unofficial theme of the emperor’s youngest son, Larsa Solidor, features a gently undulating version of the trumpet fanfare in the Theme of the Empire played by the flute (often doubled by a second flute). The insistent string accompaniment of the Theme of the Empire is likewise replaced by light pizzicato and the occasional use of the triangle or French horn. Although it is tempting to see the integration of pastoral elements in this theme as being an attempt to partially restore the connection between the idealized countryside of Arcadia in the Imperial City of Archades, the theme first plays when the party meets Larsa in Bhujerba. The theme is, therefore, arguably tied to young Larsa’s desire to bring peace to Ivalice and restore stability, which is typically

associated with life in the countryside,<sup>46</sup> rather than serving as a reflection of the landscape of his mother city.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Pharos: A Partial Mismatch Between Landscape, Music, and Etymology**

The Pharos of Ridorana, a tower with one hundred floors divided into three distinct sections, or “Ascents” (each with its own theme), is an area located within, yet at the same time separate from, the Ridorana Cataract. Since the Pharos houses the Sun Cryst, which is key to advancing the plot, traversing all the floors of the tower is an important point in the game. The similarity between the exterior design of the Pharos at Ridorana and the famed Pharos lighthouse at Alexandria in Egypt, which was one of the wonders of the world in Antiquity,<sup>48</sup> is striking (see Figures 11.1 and 11.2 below). The location of the two towers is also unmistakably similar, as ancient authors such as Strabo and Pliny describe the Pharos of Alexandria as being situated on one corner of an island just off of the city itself.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, the Pharos at Ridorana is located on the island which houses the Ridorana Cataract, though it is farther away from civilization.

Peter Clayton also notes that, after the construction of the Pharos of Alexandria, ‘pharos’ was used as “a generic term to [describe] later lighthouses”.<sup>50</sup> The Pharos at Ridorana thus has a long-standing connection with lighthouses in etymology, as “pharos” was the Greek term for “lighthouse”, a translation which remained the same when “pharos” was assimilated into both French and Italian.<sup>51</sup> It would seem, then, that the Pharos at Ridorana in *Final Fantasy XII* owes much of its design and even its name to the Pharos of Alexandria, and that these similarities are too numerous to be coincidental.

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<sup>46</sup> Gifford, *Pastoral*, 81.

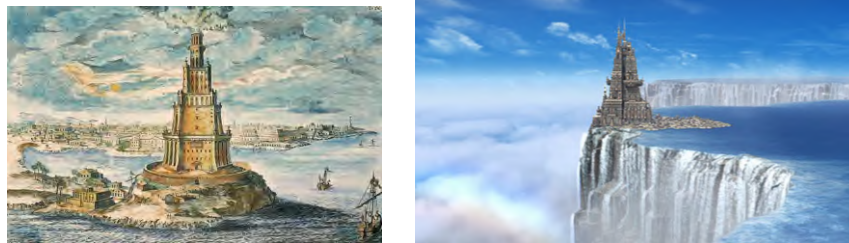
<sup>47</sup> *Final Fantasy XII* (Square Enix, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> Peter A. Clayton, “The Pharos at Alexandria,” in *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World*, eds. Peter A. Clayton and Martin J. Price (London: Routledge, 1988), 138.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Jordan, *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World* (London: Pearson, 2002), 39-40.

<sup>50</sup> Clayton, “The Pharos at Alexandria”, 138.

<sup>51</sup> Jordan, *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World*, 39.



Figures 11.1 and 11.2. On the left is Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach's 1721 representation of the Pharos of Alexandria. On the right is an exterior view of the Pharos at Ridorana in *Final Fantasy XII*.

The winding staircases of the Pharos at Ridorana, like a lighthouse, are bathed in an increasing amount of light as characters climb from one Ascent to the next, though the interior rooms off of the central spire remain relatively dark. The First Ascent, which is dingy and almost uniformly grey with little variation between each of its fifty-odd floors, is aptly represented by a track dominated by heavy, off-beat accents in the low brass. The violin melody in the A section adds to the tension with a restless, downward-moving motive, and the syncopated *pizzicato* string accompaniment in the following phrases relentlessly drives the music forward. This constant tension persists throughout the piece, which is looped indefinitely while players traverse the First Ascent. The consistency of musical texture and orchestration is perhaps indicative of the persistent darkness in the landscape, as the light from the blue sky outside does not penetrate this portion of the tower even when characters run by large windows.

Although more light reaches the Second Ascent when the characters walk along the open balcony which wraps around the space in the middle of the Pharos, the rooms off of the central spire are characteristically dark – so much so that they resemble the First Ascent. The opening section of the accompanying track likewise mimics the theme of the First Ascent with a rapid, descending sequence played by the violins, as well as off-beat brass accents, though these are more predictable (noticeably on beats three and four of each bar).

The second theme in the A section, which is slightly less driving, also features *pizzicato* strings, as in the First Ascent theme. However, there is a marked reduction in tension – and a

shift from minor to major tonality – in the B section, which is dominated by an ascending trumpet fanfare followed by a flowing French horn melody. The strings still play a vital role as the accompaniment for this section, but are more unified and regularized rhythmically with the brass melodies, as opposed to the syncopated cello/bass *pizzicato* of the First Ascent. It seems most logical to conclude, therefore, that the B section likely reflects the increased amount of light and the expanding color palette of the landscape in the spire during the Second Ascent, as the grey of the First Ascent is mixed with blue in the floors.

Although the Third Ascent is the closest to the top of the lighthouse and thus receives the most light from the top of the tower, the theme which corresponds to it on the soundtrack opens with aggressive cymbal crashes and an agitated, quickly-ascending string motive. After more cymbal crashes (which then resurface every two bars), the accompaniment is relentlessly driven forward throughout the A section by a snare drum, over which the strings play a short motive that slides down a narrow interval before repeating at the same pitch. The driving strings remain throughout the B section, but fade into the background in the C section, which features an upward-moving violin melody with largely sustained notes (taken over by the French horn in C'). Though the A and B sections are startling considering how the light grey surroundings of the Third Ascent are much brighter than the dark corridors and poor light of the First Ascent, the C section seems to be a more fitting representation of the landscape.

Though the music for the Third Ascent seems to circumvent the player's expectations based on the landscape of the area, it may be that the theme was created with the climactic battle awaiting players on the hundredth floor in mind rather than attempting to reflect the increasing light in the Pharos. The North American version of the game seems to be oriented more towards the coming battle, as the music which greets players upon their entrance into the Third Ascent is

“Clash of Swords”, a track which, by this point in the game, would be easily recognizable as music which accompanies important battles.

While it is true that many of the same instruments are used, including the snare drum, cymbals, strings, and French horn, “Clash of Swords” has a faster tempo, ‘whirling’ string and French horn motives which quickly ascend and descend, or else a sequenced string motive which gathers tension as its pitch rises. As Collins notes, the use of particular themes can “remind players of previous scenes”,<sup>52</sup> but in this case, the previous scenes are all of intense battles. Therefore, the substitution of “Clash of Swords” for the Third Ascent theme is a veritable mismatch between the music and landscape, as the former plays during battles in several different areas and is not tied to a particular landscape, let alone that of the Third Ascent. It would be interesting to note whether the Japanese version of the game retains the original music for the Third Ascent, which, with regard to Section C, is connected to and is a better reflection of the landscape of the Pharos.

### **Conclusion**

“By listening to the music, the player is able to identify his or her whereabouts...in the game”, Karen Collins writes.<sup>53</sup> This is certainly the case in *Final Fantasy XII*, as the approximately fifty tracks for the areas of Ivalice allow players to orient themselves in the fictional world and immerse themselves in its varied landscapes, including tombs, plains, capitals of empires, and remote villages. Through an extension of orchestral and film music traditions, Hitoshi Sakimoto’s music for each of these diverse areas, save for the Third Ascent of the Pharos at Ridorana, accurately represents the landscape and its traditional and mythological associations through the use of time signatures, orchestration, melodic design, accompaniment figures, and

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<sup>52</sup> Collins, *Game Sound*, 130.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

other musical elements. It is through such varied themes such as the Cerobi Steppe and the Necrohol of Nabudis that the player becomes more deeply entrenched in the world of Ivalice as he or she guides Vaan, Ashe, Basch, Balthier, Fran, and Penelo on their journey to bring an end to the war between Archadia and Rozarria.

Appendix – Map of Ivalice



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