

Miscellany

Ludomusical Boomerang.

Musical and narrative reconversions in *Final Fantasy VII Remake*

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Date received: 16-06-2023

Date of acceptance: 27-09-2023

Date published: 01-12-2023

PALABRAS CLAVE: LUDOMUSICOLOGÍA | LUDONARRATIVA | BÚMERAN LUDOMUSICAL | BANDA SONORA | FINAL FANTASY

KEYWORDS: LUDOMUSICOLOGY | LUDONARRATIVE | LUDOMUSICAL BOOMERANG | SOUNDTRACK | FINAL FANTASY

FUNDING

This work has been carried out with the predoctoral assistance for the training of research personnel from Universitat Jaume I (PREDOC/2021/12), through the UJI Research Promotion Plan.

RESUMEN

Esta investigación analiza las composiciones musicales de *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (Square-Enix, 2020) y cómo el búmeran ludomusical ha contribuido en el diseño narrativo y sonoro del videojuego. Para ello, se ha aplicado un análisis comparativo entre este título y su original lanzado en 1997, así como con los diferentes productos transmediáticos que han contribuido a la evolución sonora durante más de veinte años, a destacar: la precuela videolúdica, *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* (Square-Enix, 2007); el largometraje, *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children Complete* (Tetsuya Nomura, 2009); o los conciertos con gira internacional, *Distant Worlds: Music From Final Fantasy* (AWR Music Productions, 2007-). La construcción de la estrategia *media-mix*, propia de Japón, ha permitido que entendamos *Final Fantasy VII* como un amplio universo transmedia cuyas narrativas —y bandas sonoras— se han desplegado y reelaborado en diferentes medios hasta integrarse nuevamente a la capa ludonarrativa del *remake*. En esta investigación se han analizado dos de las composiciones más distinguidas de la entrega, “J-E-N-O-V-A - Quickening” y “One-Winged Angel - Rebirth”, con el objetivo de demostrar cómo el búmeran ludomusical contribuye a la inmersión del relato y al enriquecimiento de la experiencia de juego, siempre dependiendo del grado de alfabetización lúdica y musical mediática del jugador.

ABSTRACT

This investigation analyzes the musical compositions of *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (Square-Enix, 2020) and how the ludomusical boomerang has contributed to the video games’ narrative and sound design. To this end, a comparative analysis has been applied between this title and its original released in 1997, as well as with the different transmedia products that have contributed to the sound evolution for more than twenty years, highlighting: the video game prequel, *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* (Square-Enix, 2007); the film, *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children Complete* (Tetsuya Nomura, 2009); or the international live concerts, *Distant Worlds: Music From Final Fantasy* (AWR Music Productions, 2007-). The media-mix strategy, very common in Japan, has allowed us to understand *Final Fantasy VII* as a broad transmedia universe whose narratives —and soundtracks— have been deployed and reworked in different media until once again integrated into the ludonarrative layer of the remake. In this research, two of the most distinguished compositions have been analyzed, “J-E-N-O-V-A - Quickening” and “One-Winged Angel - Rebirth”, with the aim of demonstrating how the ludomusical boomerang contributes to the immersion of the story and the enrichment of the gaming experience, always depending on the player’s ludoliteracy and musical media literacy.

Introduction

Final Fantasy VII Remake (Square Enix, 2020) returns to the video game format after two decades of reconversion as part of Japan's distinctive media mix. This strategy arises in response to the success of a product and consists of deploying spin-off titles across multiple media and platforms (Loriguillo-López, 2021). This particular phenomenon is often designed for a fixed period (Steinberg, 2012) and has become a common strategy for celebrating the anniversaries of cultural productions, be they manga, *anime* or *gêmu*. Thus, since its release on PlayStation in 1997, the seventh instalment of the *Final Fantasy* franchise (Square-Enix, 1987 onwards) has explored different media and discourses to shape what we can recognize as its particular transmedia universe (Jenkins, 2010). That is, the diverse products around *Final Fantasy VII* have expanded their narrative world as a puzzle that can be complemented by enriching the consumer experience and becoming a challenge for the overall analysis of the texts (Guerrero-Pico & Scolari, 2016). In addition, video game music, or *geemu ongaku*, also participates in this conglomeration as it may permeate other cultural industries, such as the recording industry (Oliva, 2021). In this way, it is possible to reproduce the *Final Fantasy VII* soundtrack in physical or digital formats, but it can also be listened to – and played – in rhythmic or music video games, as in *Theatrhythm Final Bar Line* (indieszero, 2023), where the primary motivation is to pay homage to the different compositions of a franchise. Since the celebration of its tenth anniversary, Square-Enix has published numerous products around *Final Fantasy VII*, notably the animated feature film *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* (Tetsuya Nomura, 2005) or the prequel *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* (Square-Enix, 2007), all of them taken, among others, as essential titles for this research (Table 1). Our main objectives are (1) to demonstrate how transmedia influence contributes to the construction of the narrative and sound design of *Final Fantasy VII Remake* and (2) to defend the role of sound evolution in the construction of the player's pleasurable experience through a challenge of musical recognition, facilitated by the transformation processes across different media – video games, feature films, anime, and concerts.

Title	Authorship	Composer(s)	Media
<i>Final Fantasy VII</i> (1997)	Squaresoft Yoshinori Kitase	Nobuo Uematsu	Video Game
<i>Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children</i> (2005)	Square-Enix Tetsuya Nomura	Kenichiro Fukui, Nobuo Uematsu	Full-length animated film
<i>Distant Worlds: Music from Final Fantasy</i> (2007)	VVAA	Nobuo Uematsu	Concert
<i>Final Fantasy VII: Crisis Core</i> (2007)	Square-Enix Hajime Tabata	Takeharu Ishimoto	Video Game
<i>Final Fantasy VII Advent Children Complete</i> (2009)	Square-Enix, Tetsuya Nomura	Kenichiro Fukui, Nobuo Uematsu	Full-length animated film (Extended edition)
<i>Distant Worlds 2: Music from Final Fantasy</i> (2010)	VVAA	Nobuo Uematsu	Concert
<i>Final Fantasy VII Remake</i> (2020)	Square-Enix Tetsuya Nomura Naoki Hamaguchi Motomu Toriyama	Masashi Hamauzu Mitsuto Suzuki Nobuo Uematsu	Video Game

Table 1. Transmedia products related to *Final Fantasy VII* chosen for this research.

Methodology

For this study, we use a multidisciplinary methodology inherent to game studies based on the video game analysis models by Fernández-Vara (2015) and Navarro-Remesal (2016), complemented with several studies on ludomusicology, a sub-discipline that deals with video game music. We rely on Van-Elferen's (2016) ALI model, which considers the player's emotions (Affect), media Literacy, and musical Interaction. In addition, we take into consideration the semiotic fields that are present in video game music communication with the player (Hart, 2021): one focused on creation and composition which is incorporated during the game's development – which we can understand as the emission of the discourse – and one focused on the actions and player's performance during the game – which can be considered as the message's reception and interpretation.

We have used different techniques through two phases to study the musical compositions *J-E-N-O-V-A – Quickenning and One-Winged Angel – Rebirth* from *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (*FF7R* onwards). These were chosen because of their connection to the main antagonists and for their popularity among players. During the first phase, we used the analytical gameplay technique to experience games by focusing mainly on the role of music within the player's performance (Murray, 1997), understood as an aesthetic pleasure and a valuable experience. We then listened to the two tracks in order to draw a visual scheme of their musical and narrative structure, that is, attending to both the ludic phases of the boss battle and the musical narrative (Cartas, 2011). It is not easy to represent video game music on paper from an analytical point of view (Summers, 2016), and methods designed to date are relatively scarce due to the interactive, flexible and player-dependent components (Medina-Gray, 2019). Therefore, the diagrams elaborated in this paper aim to guide the reading and facilitate the interpretation of the analysis, although we consider

it essential for the reader to listen to the analysed tracks. Given the nature of this research and our competencies in Communication Sciences, our interest lies mainly in the discursive analysis of the musical elements by modules or pieces (Summers, 2016) to locate the dramatic ‘arc’ (Grimshaw, Tan & Lipscomb, 2013) and detect the psychological effects that impact the player (Brosky, 2001). In the second phase, we transferred our structure to audiovisual montage software that allowed us to tag the different fragments according to the musical rhetoric (Cartas, 2011). This has allowed us to compare the original structure of the 1997 songs with their later versions, which were composed for other video games, for the animated film, or the *Distant Worlds* concerts. Furthermore, the diagrams have helped us to consider soundtracks as a puzzle that the player can recognize and reinterpret, and whose pieces can contain a narrative charge capable of enriching the experience of playing.

Ludomusical Boomerang

During the first minutes of gameplay, a player familiar with the original *Final Fantasy VII* may be displeased to find alterations to the *FF7R* soundtrack. In the opening cinematic cutscene, the track *Midgar, City of Mako* (Nobuo Uematsu, 2020) plays, in which we can recognize two sections: an initial one attached to the leitmotif – or recurring musical theme – of Sephiroth, the character who acts as the main villain, and a second one that seems to follow on from the original track *Opening – Bombing Mission* (Nobuo Uematsu, 1997). In this second section, however, the same leitmotif intervenes once again, crossing the diegetic boundaries (Van-Elferen, 2011) and interfering in the behaviour of a second character, Aerith, who is at that moment in a deserted alley. The protagonist seems to hear the music associated with Sephiroth and seeks to confirm with her eyes what she hears but cannot see, and finally flees in fear. These first bars announce to the player a notable difference regarding the original video game, not only in terms of graphics or sound, but also in terms of narrative.

Minutes later, after finishing the first mission in the reactor, which also functions as a letter of introduction to the game and its protagonist Cloud, the song *The Promised Land – Cycle of Souls* (Nobuo Uematsu, 2020) plays, which is a direct legacy of *The Promised Land* (Nobuo Uematsu, 2005) composed for the film *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* (*Advent Children* onwards). Its involvement only complexifies *FF7R*, considering that the film tells a story that takes place two years after the events in the original *Final Fantasy VII* and which would therefore call into question the timeline established so far.

Therefore, the first hours of gameplay help us expose the double boomerang (Martín-Núñez & Navarro-Remesal, 2021) that would explain the ludonarrative complexity in the video game. When the authors refer to a double boomerang they speak of (1) a return of features that already formed the nature of the videogame and that come back to the ludonarrative layer and (2) the integration of features reframed by post-classical cinema in the

same video game narrative layer. This phenomenon would explain, to a certain extent, the new proposals of “narrative, emotional and ethical challenges to the players” (Martín-Núñez & Navarro-Remesal, 2021, p. 24) that germinate specific reconfiguration mechanics that invite them “to order the disordered pieces [...] to unveil their functioning mechanisms and the deceptive logic of characters and narrators, and to search for a closure to endow the unfolded narrative world with meaning” (Martín-Núñez & Navarro-Remesal, 2021, p. 24). Based on Martín-Núñez and Navarro-Remesal’s concept, we propose the term ludomusical boomerang to define the sonic evolution that occurs in a video game whose soundtrack has gone through different transmedia products until it is once again integrated into the ludic and narrative layer of the video game. This sound evolution would be closely affected by the technological evolution itself and its possibilities, as well as by the musical features that have been re-elaborated by other audiovisual forms. At the same time, this boomerang can display mechanics of reconfiguration, which we refer to as a narrative-musical puzzle and which inherits the media-mix’s complex nature. These mechanics can complicate the tracking of each of the original products, mainly from the perspective of the Western audience (Hernández-Pérez, 2017). In other words, a sound design affected by this phenomenon can pose a challenge to the player and even a musical recognition challenge where ludomusical literacy – comprising ludic literacy and musical media literacy (Fernández-Cortés, 2020) – is constantly being tested. If players end up memorizing music, it is because the video game is based on redundant repetition (Summer, 2016), a behaviour more similar to the television musical model than that of film (Summer, 2019). In short, the redundant nature of music in the video game medium connected with the musical boomerang offers the user a game of musical recognition that relies on the player’s affect and can enrich their experience during gameplay.

Narrative agents and hyper-diegesis

From a narratological point of view, *FF7R* is an interesting case study due to the intrusion of two narrative agents that can influence the story’s development and the music accompanying it. Although we do not intend to delve into concepts of the field of narratology in this article, we believe it is convenient to present the following two intra-diegetic agents (Cuadrado-Alvarado & Planells, 2020) to understand their participation in the soundtrack. These concepts are considered intra-diegetic because they belong to the ludo-fictional world itself – this world is understood as a fictional one with a proactive and transformative capacity for the player, which contains characters, objects, etc. and is bound by the games’ rules (Planells, 2015). A first narrative agent has already been mentioned: Sephiroth. In the original game, he is presented with a certain power over the ludo-fiction by participating in events when he lacks corporeality. In *FF7R*, moreover, this antagonist has a self-awareness of his (in)existence that transcends space and time: he knows future events and acts consequently to prevent his ultimate death. As we noted in the previous section,

in the first Sephiroth cinematic cutscene, both the player and the character of Aerith are musically highlighted, confirming that the soundtrack works from a privileged position of hyper-diegesis that allows it to act both inside and outside the fiction (Van-Elferen, 2011). In the original game, there is no intrusion of music, and Aerith never looks towards the end of the alley nor alters her behaviour.

Our second narrative agent is the Whispers, a group of characters who first appear in *FF7R*. The Echoes have their theme song, *Whispers' Theme*, which, we anticipate, is used in the music of the final battle. The Whispers are meant to intervene in the game when the depicted events threaten to diverge significantly from those in the original video game. If any character, including Sephiroth, acts differently from the original game, the Whispers appear and redirect the characters and, consequently, the player. Therefore, they operate under the condition of judges who enforce the game's rules and delimit the margins of directed freedom: possibility, obligation, prohibition and penalty (Navarro Remesal, 2016). The participation of the Whispers complicates the narrative starring an amnesiac hero who does not overcome trauma and does not accept his guilt or a significant loss, characteristics commonly found in mind-game films (Sorolla-Romero, 2018). At the same time, the non-linearity of some of the game plots foretells to the player and the protagonists the inexorability of the catastrophe and the tragedy (Sorolla-Romero, 2018). The defeat of the Whispers thus involves transforming the inexorable into the probable, the known into the unknown. Having presented the existence of these two narrative agents and how they participate in the narrative design and sound design, we can solve the narrative-musical puzzle proposed by *FF7R*.

J-E-N-O-V-A - Quickening: a meaningful prologue

During the incursion into the Shinra offices, the song *Cultivating Madness* warns the player of an impending encounter with Jenova by drawing on musical motifs from a recognizable fragment of the theme *JENOVA*. We consider the eponymous song from 1997 as an interesting battle theme because of its multiple modulations – or key changes – that allow the familiarizing of a brief theme (Figure 1) which, in turn, avoids the feeling of auditory fatigue “that makes proper attention impossible” (Dobrucki, Kin & Kruk, 2017, p. 168).

MUSICAL STRUCTURE BY PHASES				
"JENOVA"				
Nobuo Uematsu, 1997				
A	B		C	
[A]	[b1]	[b2]	[c1]	[c2]
Code	Description			
A	00:00:00 – 00:16:18 <i>Exordium</i>			
b1	00:16:18 – 00:38:06 <i>Medium. Part 1</i>			
b2	00:38:06 – 00:59:10 <i>Medium. Part 2</i>			
c1	00:59:10 – 01:10:13 <i>Finis</i>			
c2	01:10:13 – 01:15:21 <i>Finis and connexion with [b1]</i>			

Figure 1. Musical structure in phases in *JENOVA* by Nobuo Uematsu. (*Final Fantasy VII*, 1997).
 Compiled by the author.

Jenova's identity is instead called into question when listening to the opening theme for the remake, *J-E-N-O-V-A Quickening*, which consists of two short and seemingly unrelated pieces of music: *Those Chosen by the Planet* – from the original *Final Fantasy VII* – and *Beyond the Wasteland* – composed for the film *Advent Children*. The first piece is linked to the identity of Sephiroth, which reinforces the previous cinematic cutscene. The second, however, points to the animated film, specifically the introduction of Kadaj and his siblings, embodiments of Sephiroth's will and linked by a genetic relationship with Jenova. This situation forces us to question the temporal break, as we again note that the events of *Advent Children* take place two years after *Final Fantasy VII*. In addition, the song *Beyond the Wasteland* maintains the motif – albeit in a different key – of *Those Chosen by the Planet*, reinforcing the idea of the bond between Sephiroth and Jenova, the antagonists.

J-E-N-O-V-A - Quickening: arc and fullness

The track for the battle against Jenova in the remake can be divided into three musical stages linked to the boss phases – or six if we count the prologue, interlude and closing cinematic cutscenes (Figure 2). The original composition by Nobuo Uematsu can be recognized when the player begins the fight, in both the first and second stages, albeit with notable differences. While the original theme uses synthesizers with techno-electronic influences, the adaptation opts for an orchestrated version with a slower tempo and choral voices – as already experimented with in *Distant Worlds: Music From Final Fantasy*. That is, although the score resembles the original, the musical genre moves away from electronic music to explore a style closer to the music of action RPGs or the hack-and-slash¹ game scores by composer Tadayoshi Makino, who participated in video game franchises such as *Monster Hunter* (Capcom, 2004 onwards) or *Dragon's Dogma* (Capcom, 2012). Regardless of the

1 *Hack and slash* is a genre originating from tabletop role-playing games and is distinguished from other genres by real-time melee combat.

musical genre, the player has the tools to recognize the song and its function in the ludofictional world due to the reuse of the classical RPG musical scheme that “has become an element firmly linked to the identity of JRPGs” (Fernández-Cortés, 2020, p. 191) and its sub-genres. Whether it is a direct influence of the arrangements made for concert halls or an inheritance of a musical style linked to another video game genre, we consider the composition to be affected by the ludomusical boomerang.

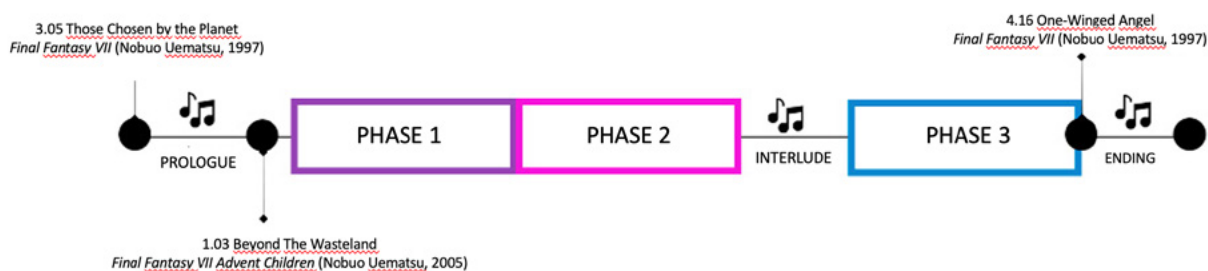


Figure 2. Visual structure of the song *J-E-N-O-V-A – Quickenings* by Tadayoshi Makino and Nobuo Uematsu. (*Final Fantasy VII Remake*, 2020). Compiled by the author.

Beyond the difficulty set by the game design – which may depend on the user’s skills with both the mechanics and the use of the peripheral – the player can interpret the difficulty of the battle against Jenova through “their expectations and previous experience, framed in a specific socio-cultural context that transforms and nuances the experience” (Terrasa-Torres, 2022, p. 36). That is, if the player has already faced this antagonist in the original video game, they can transfer the previous experience to their experience in the remake. The composer, aware of this possibility, participates in the expectations for *FF7R* “because the game creates a specific sound palette that aims to direct the player’s emotions through ambient sound and music” (Terrasa-Torres, 2022, p. 82). Thus, the resource used for this composition is the change of music genre between the first two phases and the third (see Figure 2), the latter being identifiable as the original 1997 *Jenova* song.

The *tempo* in the third phase increases, which is also a relevant effect, especially when considering how perception of ‘time’ overlaps with the perception of ‘velocity’ (Brosky, 2001, p. 223). At the same time, the choir loses prominence, and the musical instruments are altered to approximate the electronic style of the original composition. This high point forms the ‘arc’ in the musical track, understood as “a construction of tension as the player makes progress towards a goal, eventually reaching a climax” (Grimshaw, Tan & Lipscomb, 2013, p. 297).

Furthermore, the last phase almost entirely recaptures the musical structure of the original *Final Fantasy VII* [A+B+C] (Figure 3). This similarity accentuates the musical pleasure that psychoanalysis posits ‘as stemming from both our pre-birth experience as well as our earliest, pre-linguistic existence’ (Kathryn Kalinak, 2010, p. 29). If there is a link in the past to the original title, the player will seek – and find – in *J-E-N-O-V-A – Quickenings* that “return to the original state of plenitude” (Kalinak, 2010, p. 29), possibly located in their childhood

or adolescence. In addition, recognizing, predicting or anticipating a segment or part of a song is a pleasurable and rewarding experience for our brain (Zatorre & Salimpoor, 2013, p. 10435) and stimulates the player.

MUSICAL STRUCTURE BY PHASES									
“JENOVA”									
Nobuo Uematsu, 1997									
A	B			C			...		
[A]	[b1]	[b2]	[c1]	[c2]	[b1]				
“J-E-N-O-V-A - Quickening”									
Nobuo Uematsu and Tadayoshi Makino, 2020									
PROLOGUE [X] + PHASE 1									
PRO		A	B		D		A	...	
[x1]	[x2]	[A*]	[b1]	[b2]	[d1]	[d1]	[A]	[b1]	
[x1] = “Those Chosen by the Planet” [x2] = “Beyond the Wasteland” [A*] = shortened version [d1] = like [b2] with new choir [d2] = new section with choir									
PHASE 2 + INTERLUDE [Y]									
E	C	B		C		F	...	INT	
[e1]	[e1]	[c1]	[b1]	[b2]	[c1]	[c2]	[F]	[e1]	[Y]
[e1] = interlude connecting phases 1 and 2 [e2] = new choir section [c1r] = repeat [F] = new section connecting with [e1] [Y] = interlude connecting phases 2 and 3									
PHASE 3 + ENDING [Z]									
A	B		C			A	G	...	END
[A]	[b1]	[b2]	[A]	[c1r]	[c2]	[A]	[G]	[A]	[Z]
[G] = “One-Winged Angel” [Z] = new section as battle ending									

Figure 3. Musical structure in phases in the original JENOVA compared with J-E-N-O-V-A – *Quickening* by Nobuo Uematsu and Tadayoshi Makino (*Final Fantasy VII Remake*, 2020). Compiled by the author.

In conclusion, the musical block labelled with the letter G in the third phase is also worth mentioning. The composers and designers introduce Sephiroth’s participation in this song and intervene in the affect of the player by recovering the structure of the original. As if the confirmation of the character’s influence during the prologue were not enough, the antagonist intervenes in the soundtrack through a fragment of *One-Winged Angel* (Nobuo Uematsu, 1997) that skips the chorus and is identified by string instruments (minute 5:35 of *J-E-N-O-V-A - Quickening*). Sephiroth’s involvement in this last phase goes beyond the composers’ desire to make Jenova’s real identity evident and can instead be analysed as a statement of intent by this intra-diegetic and omniscient narrative agent: a challenge for both Cloud and the player.

Summing up, the song *J-E-N-O-V-A – Quickening* shows how the narrative-musical puzzle inherited from the musical boomerang is constructed. It starts from the prologue, blocks ‘x1’ and ‘x2’ (see Figure 3), and goes to the last phase of the battle, block G. In only a few minutes, the composition introduces us to different characters: Kadaj and his brothers – hinting at the possibility of a gap in the original chronology – as well as the involvement of Sephiroth (which requires the user to have at least a minimal media literacy as proposed in the ALI model). At the same time, the sonic transformation from the first phases to the last (interaction of the music with the player’s agency) promotes the recovery of a previous experience and a consequent stimulus (affect) that can alter gameplay.

One-Winged Angel Rebirth: revenge is in the rhythm

One-Winged Angel is the canonized theme with which players, whether of the *Final Fantasy* franchise or the RPG genre in general, can recognise Sephiroth beyond his physical characteristics – long, silver hair, or his weapon – an extremely long katana. It is one of Nobuo Uematsu’s first compositions for the series to feature choral vocals. The Latin lyrics refer to *Carmina Burana* (Carl Orff, 1936) and distinguish it from the rest of the saga’s compositions. The structure is like other boss battle themes but has many different parts, making it difficult to label the song under one genre. The first part of the introduction of *One-Winged Angel* (Figure 4) has two characteristic contrasting rhythmic patterns: the first is marked by timpani, while the second is more melodic and is differentiated by the predominance of strings and woodwind instruments. This introductory passage is closely linked to the video game *Final Fantasy VII* and the character of Sephiroth and will be adapted to subsequent transmedia titles. *One-Winged Angel* can even be heard in video games outside the franchise where Sephiroth appears (*Kingdom Hearts II*² or *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate*³).

2 Boss Fight Database, “Kingdom Hearts 2: Sephiroth Boss Fight (PS3 1080p)”, 9 June 2022, YouTube video, 7:51, <https://youtu.be/TIYfpqS-eAE>

3 Gamespot, “Super Smash Bros. Ultimate Sephiroth Reveal Trailer | Game Awards 2020”, 9 June 2022, YouTube video, 3:10, <https://youtu.be/bJ025Dtg1bo>

"Vengeance on the World"								
Crisis Core, 2007								
A	B			G	C			A
aCC	[b1.1]	[b2]	[b1.2]	[G]	[c1]	[c2]	[c3*]	[a1*]
[aCC] = new version for <i>Crisis Core</i>								
[c3*] = ending [c3] and opening to [aCC]								
[a1*] = first contrasting rhythmic pattern of "One Winged Angel"								

"Advent: One-Winged Angel"																
Advent Children Complete, 2009																
A			B					J				C	G	C		
[a1]	[a2]	[a3]	[b1.1]	[b2]	[b1.2]	[b3]	[b4]	[b5]	[j1]	[j2]	[j3]	[j4]	[c1]	[G]	[c2]	[c3]

"One-Winged Angel: Rebirth"									
FF7R, 2020 [INT + Phase 3A]									
A	B			G	B		C		
[a1]	[b1.1]	[b2]	[b1.2]	[G]	[b1.1]	[b1.2]	[c1]	[c2]	[c3]

Figure 4. Musical structure in phases in *One Winged Angel* by Nobuo Uematsu (*Final Fantasy VII*, 1997).
 Compiled by the author.

Over the years, *One-Winged Angel* has had many changes that have returned to the remake. *Distant Worlds: Music from Final Fantasy* featured an early orchestrated version of the original synthesized composition. *Advent Children* fused classical music with rock music – and even added a new section between *Medium* and *Finis*, with new choirs and electric guitar solos. *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* (*Crisis Core* onwards) modified the musical style and altered the Introduction (*Exordium*) and Ending (*Finis*). All arrangements have contrasting rhythmic patterns in their scores. However, this characteristic opening rhythm is transferred to another part of the song in *Crisis Core* and *FF7R*. This raises the question of why the pattern that identifies Sephiroth in these two video games is omitted.

Crisis Core is a prequel that takes place a few years before the original game's events. In this adventure, Sephiroth does not yet act as an antagonist, nor does he have the same goals as in *Final Fantasy VII*. At a specific moment in this title, Zack, the protagonist, fights a Sephiroth suffering from an existential crisis. In this battle, we can hear an arrangement of *One-Winged Angel* entitled *Vengeance on the World*. Sephiroth's evolution – from hero to villain – is also articulated in this musical theme, which begins with the breakdown of the contrasting rhythmic patterns but which is partially recovered in the last block of the song, albeit only with the timpani. We can determine that the rhythmic pattern is born from Sephiroth's desire for revenge rather than his identity.

In *FF7R's One-Winged Angel: Rebirth*, we have two introductions, one at the beginning of the fight and the other when the third boss phase begins. The first introduction starts with only the second rhythmic pattern, the melodic one, continuing where *Crisis Core* left off and, at the same time, making it clear that the Sephiroth presented to the heroes is not complete. One would have to summarize the original *Final Fantasy VII* story to understand these con-

trasting patterns. According to the events of *Crisis Core*, Sephiroth is defeated by a young Cloud, and his involvement in the original game is primarily spiritual. His resurrection – or awakening – does not occur until later. *FF7R* only covers a small fragment of the entire timeline presented in the original game: from the eco-terrorist attack on Shinra’s reactor to the escape from Midgar. In this brief part, Sephiroth is far from resurrected – at least in corporate terms – so his involvement in the story is exclusively made through other characters that he uses as vehicles to prevent Cloud and his companions from winning. Still, Sephiroth is the main opponent in the final battle in *FF7R*; an encounter that is not yet supposed to happen according to the original game’s timeline. Considering the nature of a final battle that should not occur, it begins to make sense that the *One-Winged Angel* arrangement for *FF7R* omits the contrasting rhythmic patterns at the beginning of the encounter.

One-Winged Angel Rebirth: a meaningful chaos

One-Winged Angel – Rebirth starts in the denouement of the video game and is presented as a chaotic composition compared to its original. The player may recognize fragments and motifs from the original track *One-Winged Angel*, but the song may feel like a jumbled and meaningless puzzle. However, we argue that the chaos is narratively meaningful. *One-Winged Angel – Rebirth* can be divided into three main phases preceded by a prologue or interlude, just like J-E-N-O-V-A – Quickening. Nevertheless, the third phase can be subdivided into two further blocks: upon fulfilling a specific condition on the remaining boss life, the music advances to a short final stage as a prelude to the final blow. For this analysis, it is easier to give indications if we apply the following subdivision (Figure 5).

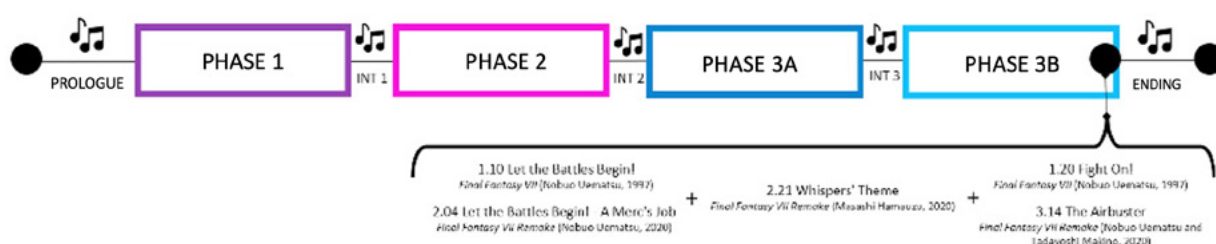


Figure 5. Visual structure of the song *One-Winged Angel – Rebirth* by Masashi Hamauzu, Yasunori Nishiki and Nobuo Uematsu. (*Final Fantasy VII Remake*, 2020). Compiled by the author.

In the previous section, we mentioned the omission of the contrasting rhythmic patterns in the composition for the remake. The alteration or absence of these patterns is intimately linked to the character and his revenge, giving a sense of the very nature of the combat or the boss. In the first phase, the music makes us question the identity of the Sephiroth shown to us. Furthermore, we can also suspect the musical intervention of the Whispers through choral voices reminiscent of *Whispers’ Theme* that fill the void of a broken contrasting rhythmic pattern.

The first two musical phases are similar and it is difficult to recognize the original patterns: the music bewilders the listeners; it makes them feel they are in the middle of a chaotic track. The familiar and expected order of the composition does not emerge until the battle reaches its third phase. As we can see in Figure 6, the original structure [A+B+C] is most faithfully represented in phase 3A. In fact, it is at this stage that the characteristic rhythmic patterns of *One-Winged Angel* are clearly audible (minute 4:05 of *One-Winged Angel – Rebirth*), at the moment when Sephiroth spreads his black wing, which gives its name to the song.

MUSICAL STRUCTURE BY PHASES											
"ONE WINGED ANGEL: REBIRTH"											
Masashi Hamauzu, Yasunori Nishiki and Nobuo Uematsu, 2020											
PHASE 1											
A	D		B	A	D	C		B	C	...	
[a1*]	[d1]	[d1]	[b1.1*]	[a3]	[d3]	[c1]	[c1r]	[b1.1*]	[c2]	[d1]	
[a1*] = second contrasting rhythmic pattern [d1] = Exordium pt. 1 with "Whispers Theme" influence + [a1*] [d2] = Exordium pt. 2 [b1.1*] = Choir in a shortened version [d3] = Exordium pt. 3 [c1r] = repeat											
INT + PHASE 2											
INT 1		A	D	B	E	C		B	F		
[a3*]	[X]	[a2]	[d4]	[b2*]	[E]	[c1]	[c1r]	[b1.1]	F		
[a3*] = shortened version for Interlude 1 [X] = Interlude 1 + [a1*] [d4] = short section for connecting [a2] with [b2*] [b2*] = Choir in a shortened version [E] = short section for connecting with [c1] [F] = short section for ending and connecting with Interlude 2											
INT 2 + PHASE 3A											
INT 2		A	B		G	B		C			
[b3*]	[Y]	[a1]	[b1.1]	[b2]	[b1.2]	[G]	[b1.1]	[b1.2]	[c1]	[c2]	[c3]
[b3*] = short section as interlude [Y] = Interlude 2 [G] = instrumental version of [b1.1]											
INT 3 + Phase 3B											
INT 3	C		H	B		I			...		
[Z]	[c1]	[c2]	[H]	[b1.1]	[b1.1r]	[i1]	[i2]	[i3]	[c1]		
[Z] = interlude 3 as ending [H] = short section for connecting with [b1.1] [b1.1r] = repeat [i1] = "Let the Battles Begin" [i2] = "Whispers' Theme" [i3] = "Fight On!"											
ENDING											
C		B			C						
[c3*]	[b4]	[b5]	[c1]	[c2]	[c3]						
[c3*] = instrumental version of [c3]											

Figure 6. Musical structure in phases in *One-Winged Angel – Rebirth* (2020). Compiled by the author.

As with the fight against Jenova, the player recognizes Sephiroth's theme in the third stage and may feel that the battle is more difficult as they can recall their past experience. This ascending challenge is ironic because the difficulty grows as the stages of the battle progress and the other allies join Cloud. What begins as a one-on-one duel ends as a group battle, which is evident in the soundtrack, as we will discuss in a later section.

As we have seen, the musical chaos in *One-Winged Angel - Rebirth* tends to confuse a player who does not recognize the song in its entirety and thus does not accept the identity of the Sephiroth he faces. This changes the moment the antagonist unfurls his wing at the start of the third phase, and the contrasting rhythmic patterns return, bringing about an increase in difficulty and, in addition, calling into question what could hitherto be considered a battle against a false Sephiroth.

One-Winged Angel Rebirth: events from the past, present and future

The third part of the final battle recovers a very similar structure to the original track. However, this last part hides several narrative clues due to the ludomusical boomerang. In this section, we will concentrate on block G of phase 3A (see Figure 6), which focuses on the secondary character Zack – the deceased protagonist of *Crisis Core* who bequeaths his dreams to Cloud. This musical fragment can be described as an instrumental version of block b1.1 of phase 3A. This variation, which may go unnoticed on the first listening, contains narrative information capable of foretelling and confirming events to the player. This is because music in interactive drama, as Powell argues, “may be indicative of events past, present, or future with respect to the narrative itself, not gameplay; a cue may provide information for the current playthrough or subsequent playthroughs” (Powell, 2020, p. 29). The absence of voices in a fragment traditionally dominated by a choir is a resource that comes from *Crisis Core* and is later recovered for the film *Advent Children* in its extended version in 2009, which we identify with the letter G in Figure 7.

"Vengeance on the World"									
<i>Crisis Core, 2007</i>									
A	B			G	C			A	
aCC	[b1.1]	[b2]	[b1.2]	[G]	[c1]	[c2]	[c3*]	[a1*]	
[aCC] = new version for <i>Crisis Core</i>									
[c3*] = ending [c3] and opening to [aCC]									
[a1*] = first contrasting rhythmic pattern of "One Winged Angel"									

"Advent: One-Winged Angel"																
<i>Advent Children Complete, 2009</i>																
A			B					J				C	G	C		
[a1]	[a2]	[a3]	[b1.1]	[b2]	[b1.2]	[b3]	[b4]	[b5]	[j1]	[j2]	[j3]	[j4]	[c1]	[G]	[c2]	[c3]

"One -Winged Angel: Rebirth"									
<i>FF7R, 2020 [INT + Phase 3A]</i>									
A	B			G	B		C		
[a1]	[b1.1]	[b2]	[b1.2]	[G]	[b1.1]	[b1.2]	[c1]	[c2]	[c3]

Figure 7. Comparison of the musical structure of the different versions of *One-Winged Angel*. From top to bottom *Vengeance on the World* by Kazuhiko Toyama (*Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII*, 2007), *Advent: One-Winged Angel - ACC Long Version* by Nobuo Uematsu, Kazuhiko Toyama and Shiro Hamaguchi (*Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children Complete*, 2009) and *One-Winged Angel - Rebirth* by Masashi Hamauzu, Yasunori Nishiki and Nobuo Uematsu. (*Final Fantasy VII Remake*, 2020). Compiled by the author.

First, we associate this instrumental fragment with the battle that took place in *Crisis Core* between Zack and Sephiroth. Next, we instantly associate it with the sequence when Sephiroth impales Cloud with his katana. The next time we hear this musical excerpt from *Crisis Core* is in *Advent Children Complete*. The animated film begins with the instrumental fragment when Sephiroth impales Cloud again and concludes when Cloud hears the voice of a deceased Zack. The player definitively associates the instrumental part with a sequence starring Zack, Sephiroth, and Cloud (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Comparison of *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* (2007) and *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children Complete* (2009) sequences, featuring Zack as principal axis.

When in *FF7R* we hear the instrumental fragment again, the player can interpret it as a sample of a past event about Zack's legacy and, additionally, a future event. Before the final battle in the remake, the player witnesses the sequence from *Crisis Core*, when Zack is defeated. Following the original chronology, this time jump does not make sense, so it alerts the player that they are looking to sort out a puzzle. In *FF7R*, Cloud defeats the Whispers – and a suspicious evocation of Sephiroth – and he manages to break past and future events, thus creating a new timeline where Zack never dies.

Ultimately, in this third battle phase, the music warns of Zack's importance in the new remake story. However, as we have argued throughout this investigation, only a musically literate gamer with prior knowledge of every *Final Fantasy VII* franchise transmedia product has the tools to decipher the soundtrack's hidden message.

One-Winged Angel Rebirth: the closure of the narrative musical puzzle

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the ludomusical boomerang allows a video game such as *FF7R* to constantly present the player with a musical recognition challenge in its soundtrack. This narrative-musical puzzle allows the player to recognize other musical cues or leitmotifs and thus make associated predictions coupled with a feeling of reward (Zatorre & Salimpoor, 2013: 10435). These leitmotifs should be easy to identify and remember, as Summers argues for *Final Fantasy VII* and Nobuo Uematsu's compositions (2016, p. 170). If the narrative-musical puzzle works, it is because of the very adaptive nature of the leitmotif: it comprises a musical physiognomy and a musical association, evolves

to create new musical-dramatic contexts and works in a broader musical structure (Brittner-Stull, 2010, p. 10). This narrative-musical puzzle is not limited to providing pleasure or being gratifying for the listener, but goes beyond that and, as we have seen in previous examples, can be endowed with narrative information.

In *One-Winged Angel – Rebirth*, specifically in phase 3B (see Figure 6), identified as the moment before the final blow, the player can recognize up to three pieces unrelated to Sephiroth’s theme in short half-minute fragments that merge with the style of the main composition. In order of appearance, we first hear the song *Let the Battles Begin!*, which is identified as the common battle theme from *Final Fantasy VII*. Throughout the remake, it appears on several occasions and in multiple arrangements. This first track comes right after a noticeable tempo increase during the repeat of the *Exordium* part b1.1. This recovered score brings with it the affection tied to the many previous battles experienced by the player with the group of heroes throughout their game. If *One-Winged Angel* belongs to Sephiroth and his desire for revenge, *Let the Battles Begin!* represents the bond between the main characters, which is why its participation in this narrative-musical puzzle has as its primary objective to confront both figures and highlight the existential paradox of a villain motivated by the presence of the hero: there is no good without evil; life without death, nor hero without villain (Montañana-Velilla, 2018, p. 100).

Whispers’s Theme is the song that follows this particular puzzle and was composed for the remake. Its interruption is longer and seeks to remind the player that they are fighting against the will of the Whispers, the guardians of destiny. This narrative agent is hostile because the heroes have decided to break the known timeline. The Whispers are temporarily embodied in the will of Sephiroth – the undisputed obstacle of a protagonist tormented by failure – to escape the dichotomy of space and time of the original 1997 video game events. Finally, and as a denouement of this musical parenthesis, the player can recognize the beginning of the track *Fight On!* – or *The Airbuster* in the remake – which acts as a bridge for the sound loop of phase 3B (see Figure 6). This piece evokes boss fights where dramatic moments and pyrrhic victories are formulated and attempts to write meaningful scenes for the story that the player constructs (Terrasa-Torres, 2022, p. 72). Summers stresses that “direct repetition and the re-use of cues are emphasized because leitmotif identification is generally easier with a reprise than with a variation” (2016, p. 170), and it is due to this variation that the latter is more challenging to identify. Besides being the shortest of the three, we hear this last leitmotif in a different tempo.

This musical parenthesis, where the narrative-musical puzzle becomes evident, is repeated in a loop until the player eventually defeats the enemy. This facilitates – even if it does not ensure – recognition by a player focused on striking the final blow and achieving absolute victory.

Conclusions

The ludomusical boomerang participates in the transmedia universe of *Final Fantasy VII* and allows the player to enjoy a diverse and complex sound experience in *FF7R*. The player can recognize elements from specific leitmotifs to narrative fragments taken from the original video game, as well as from the movie, anime and other video games. This recognition will depend on their engagement with the franchise. Therefore, *FF7R*'s extensive soundtrack and sound design contribute to players' engagement, as they can be immersed in a music recognition challenge.

We have confirmed that the narrative-musical puzzle is consciously designed by *FF7R*'s group of composers and that it considers the influences of the different narrative agents directly involved in the development of the plot: Sephiroth and the Whispers. A player with an accentuated musical literacy can identify characters, anticipate narrative events and even recapture the experience of divergent stories from the fictional universe. It also allows the listener to perceive Sephiroth's sense of revenge and his transformation from hero to villain or, as we have seen, the existential paradox of good and evil.

Through this research, we have demonstrated that the soundtrack to *FF7R* is integrated into different layers of the video game medium and reinforces the narrative through a complex sound design. This is possible mainly with the awareness of a ludomusical boomerang of all the *Final Fantasy VII* franchise that has been expanding from 1997 to the present day and which rewards the player with a satisfying sound experience.

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