

Music Analysis and Research of the Background Music of Genshin Impact

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Abstract:

The exclusive background music for the Nata region in Genshin Impact, titled “Natlan”, features a flame-like melody that embodies the game’s “One Country, One Style” creative philosophy. This composition deeply integrates the Nata people’s passionate, free-spirited, and mysterious worldview. By deconstructing elements from Native American and African tribal music, the piece undergoes reimagining across three dimensions: melody, rhythm, and harmony. Through lively interval leaps, dynamic polyrhythmic patterns, and intricate harmonic arrangements, it organically blends musical traits from diverse civilizations, vividly showcasing Nata’s regional cultural identity. This creation enriches the game’s musical cultural depth, establishes a comprehensive cross-cultural integration framework, and provides valuable insights for cross-cultural music research. It also offers clear analytical guidance, serving as a practical reference for similar musical creations.

Keywords:

Genshin Impact, Natlan, Game Music, Cross-cultural Fusion, Music Element Analysis

1. Introduction

As digital entertainment expands globally, Genshin Impact by miHoYo has swiftly captured worldwide attention through its stunning visuals, immersive storyline, and distinctive cultural elements. This game not only delivers entertainment but also serves as a cultural ambassador, with its soundtrack becoming a cultural icon. In 2021, the game’s music earned the runner-up position at Sony’s PlayStation Game Music Awards, a testament to the production team’s exceptional creative prowess.

Background music in games transcends mere auditory embellishment—it serves as a vital link between players and the game world. It shapes specific scene atmospheres, conveys character emotions, and carries profound cultural significance.[1] Genshin Impact excels in this regard, with region-specific custom music. The melodies of Mond region embody the refined elegance of medieval Europe, while those of Liyue blend Eastern ethnic instruments with Western orchestral artistry. These musical elements allow players to directly experience the unique charm of different civilizations during exploration, thereby enhancing the game’s artistic value and its enduring appeal.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on Genshin Impact

Since Genshin Impact's global phenomenon, academic research on the game has expanded significantly. Current studies primarily focus on two dimensions: visual elements and narrative structure, examining how the game innovatively presents China's traditional culture through character development and scene design, while exploring its role in cross-cultural dissemination and the formation of cultural significance. [2] In contrast to visual and narrative studies, background music research remains relatively underdeveloped. Although some studies acknowledge music's crucial role in cultural transmission, few delve into specific compositions, failing to fully uncover the artistic value and underlying creative principles embedded in the game's music.

2.2. Research on Game Music

Game music represents a unique art form that must possess independent aesthetic value while seamlessly integrating with game environments, character emotions, and narrative pacing. [3] The background music system in Genshin Impact has garnered widespread acclaim for its multicultural fusion style. Among these, "Natlan" stands as a landmark composition from the Nat region, blending distinct characteristics of Latin American and African music with a distinctive style that holds significant academic value. Currently, scholarly research on this piece lacks a comprehensive framework, with most discussions remaining at the level of general cultural dissemination without detailed analysis of essential musical elements like melody, rhythm, and harmony. Building on this gap, this study focuses on the key musical components of "Natlan" to explore its cross-cultural creative approaches. The research aims to enrich the theoretical framework of game music studies and provide practical references for creators.

3. Background of Natlan

3.1. Creative Team and Creative Concept

Natlan is a musical composition by HOYO-MIX, a music team under miHoYo founded in 2014. Guided by the philosophy of "blending diverse cultures to convey emotions and narratives," the team has dedicated years to developing game and anime music. When creating music for Genshin Impact, they adhered to the principle of "one country, one style," avoiding mechanical replication of cultural symbols. Instead, they explored the essence of regional cultures and musical characteristics, skillfully blending traditional elements with modern game composition techniques. This approach transforms each background score into a culturally distinctive and immersive artistic masterpiece.

The HOYO-MIX team sought to authentically capture the spiritual essence of the Natlan region. They devoted extensive efforts to studying traditional music from Central America, South America, and Africa. Drawing inspiration from Latin Latinas and Samba's vibrant rhythms, they extracted dynamic energy, while African tribal music's distinctive syncopated rhythms and harmonies revealed primal vitality. Inspired by the melodic lines of indigenous American music, these elements were reimagined through modern arrangement techniques. By transcending temporal and

spatial boundaries, these musical components from diverse continents converged to create the distinctive cross-cultural style of “Natlan”.

3.2. Cultural Origins and Inspiration Sources

The melody of “Natlan” blends the cultural DNA of diverse civilizations from the Americas and Africa, drawing inspiration primarily from three ancient civilizations.

3.2.1. The Aztec Civilization in Central America

The Aztec civilization in Central America was centered on the sun worship and sacrificial culture. Its music mostly used the drum, flute and other instruments, the rhythm was strong, the melody was high, and it was full of primitive and burning emotion, which formed the foundation of the rhythm planning and emotional tone of the music.

3.2.2. The Inca Civilization in South America

Inca civilization is located in South America, it prefers simple and pure melody lines, and attaches importance to complex harmonic layers, the panpipes, harp and other instruments are used in its music, which makes the music closely connected with nature and religion, and then influences the formation of the melody and the arrangement of the harmony.

3.2.3. African Sahel Civilization

The tribal music of the African Sahel civilization is characterized by its syncopated rhythms and polyphonic choruses, with a style that is unrestrained and full of vitality. This unique rhythmic quality serves as a key inspiration for the rhythmic design of musical compositions.

4. Music Analysis of Natlan

4.1. Melody Analysis

Melody is the essence of musical expression. Research demonstrates that varying interval combinations can evoke distinct emotional responses. [4] The melody of “Natlan” mirrors the fiery essence of the Natlan region, radiating tension and dynamism. The piece opens with a small sixth leap that instantly captivates the listener, then evolves through rich and varied interval usage. The smooth progression of major seconds and minor thirds creates natural flow, while the bold leaps of fourths and fifths deliver powerful auditory impact. For instance, between measures 21-29, the melody ascends from the tonic through a minor third before transitioning to a pure fourth leap. This unconventional melodic trajectory breaks conventional stability, vividly embodying the untamed vitality and primal energy characteristic of Natlan as the “Land of Fire.”

The composition masterfully employs melodic techniques including repetition, sequence, and variation repetition, achieving a balance between thematic coherence and dynamic diversity. The verse section features repeated core melodic fragments in their original form, reinforcing the thematic memorability. The chorus employs descending sequence, reimagining the melody across different pitches to preserve essential characteristics while introducing fresh elements. At transitional sections, the melodic variations serve as the finishing touch—maintaining the core structure while

adjusting rhythms or adding ornaments, ensuring the progression remains logically clear and engaging.

The rhythmic patterns in the melody are rich in distinctive characteristics, featuring stable quarter notes, intricate dotted notes, and syncopated rhythms. These dynamic variations continuously enrich the emotional depth of the music. The core motif undergoes repeated variations across different sections, evolving to maintain the emotional tone required by the game's setting, creating an immersive auditory experience for players.



Figure 1. Natlan "Theme Song for the Natta Region.

4.2. The Compatibility of Melody and Worldview

The melodic design masterfully resonates with Nata's worldview, featuring undulating rhythms and frequent interval leaps that resemble flames—alternating between jubilant and fervent dynamics. This auditory and tactile embodiment of fire's essence is conveyed through major second and minor third progressions, flowing like a river of civilization that symbolizes the inheritance and evolution of Nata's cultural legacy. The descending modal progression in the chorus carries a tragic yet resolute tone, powerfully conveying Nata's core characteristic of "war as its soul."

The melody is characterized by the features of the music of the Native Americans and the music of the African tribes, namely the simple and powerful lines and the strong expression of emotion, which is in line with the civilization form of the Nata tribal alliance, so that the listener can directly experience the simplicity and innocence of the Nata culture.

4.3. Rhythm Analysis

The rhythm of this composition serves as a pivotal element in cross-cultural fusion, blending the essence of Latin American and African music to create distinctive composite rhythmic patterns. The piece prominently features syncopated rhythms characteristic of African music, while its accent treatment defies conventional norms: Firstly, syncopation alters accent positions to create accent effects on weak beats; Secondly, different instrumental groups take turns emphasizing accents, thereby adding rhythmic layering.

These rhythmic designs are deeply rooted in Nata cultural essence. The African-inspired syncopated rhythms embody the primal vitality of tribal civilization, reflecting the Nata people's love for freedom and reverence for strength. Latin American dance music rhythms showcase the Nata culture's passionate and dynamic nature, complementing the fiery atmosphere of the "Land of Fire". The complex rhythmic patterns and varied accents create intense musical energy, mirroring the Nata belief in "war as the soul" —where rhythmic fluctuations mirror battlefield combat and shouts, allowing listeners to directly experience the exhilarating yet tragic emotions of heroic struggles. In essence, rhythm serves not only as the foundation of music but also as the auditory embodiment of Nata culture.

4.4. Harmonic Analysis

The composition transcends traditional harmonic conventions with its innovative and distinctive approach. It frequently employs chromatic chords and augmented chords, such as the C major triad with a sixth note at the verse's opening, which creates a warm and delicate tonal quality that reflects Nata's passionate and inclusive nature. Moreover, the use of dissonant chords in the piece generates tension and unease, thereby enhancing the music's expressive power. [5]

The composition breaks away from the conventional "tonic-tonic-subdominant" harmonic structure, adopting a more spontaneous and self-expressive approach. The chorus features extensive parallel chord progressions, creating an expansive and majestic auditory experience. At the transitions between sections, the chord tones undergo abrupt shifts, generating dramatic tension. For instance, the sudden transition from a bright major triad to a somber minor triad propels the musical emotion forward, vividly capturing Natanah's enigmatic and ever-changing essence.

4.5. Compatibility between Harmony and Worldview

The harmonic design of Natlan resonates deeply with its worldview, employing a rich array of chromatic chords that mirror the cultural diversity of Natlan. The added tones evoke warmth, embodying the culture's passionate inclusiveness. Suspended chords create intense tension, highlighting the theme of heroic resistance, while altered chords convey a sense of mystery, reflecting Natlan's multifaceted nature. The harmonic progression follows a free-flowing logic, breaking free from traditional constraints—much like Natlan civilization itself, which has always thrived through unbridled creativity.

The grand atmosphere created by parallel chords is in harmony with the vast geographical environment of Nata and the collective spirit of the tribal alliance. The change in chord colors during paragraph transitions implies the unity of contradictions in Nata's worldview, such as "fire and rebirth" and "war and peace," making harmony the key carrier of game narration and cultural expression.

5. Exploration of the Musical Style of Natlan

5.1. Expression of Regional Style

The regional style of Natlan is the auditory embodiment of its "volcanic and passionate" traits. In terms of melody, the vigorous and distinct thematic motifs mimic the fiery intensity and vitality of volcanoes. The selection of scales and rhythmic patterns is deeply rooted in the rich soil of ethnic music from both the

Americas and Africa, thereby endowing the music with distinctive regional characteristics.

The composer demonstrates remarkable ingenuity in timbre selection, employing percussion instruments to recreate the thunderous roar of volcanic eruptions. Natural sound effects are seamlessly integrated to heighten the music's visual impact. Together, these elements paint a vivid portrait of the unique landscape of the Nata region, transporting listeners to a fiery realm brimming with untamed vitality.

5.2. Integration of Cultural Styles

“Natlan” features a distinct collision and fusion of Chinese and Western musical styles. In terms of instrument usage, the timbres of traditional Chinese ethnic instruments such as the erhu and bamboo flute are incorporated, adding an Eastern charm to the music. Western symphonic instruments like the string section and brass section create a grand acoustic framework, enhancing the musical layers and tension.

From a musical structure perspective, this piece references the sonata form and variation techniques of Western classical music to maintain structural rigor, while incorporating the improvisational nature and linear thinking of China's traditional music, making the melodic flow more lively and natural. This fusion is not a simple combination of elements but a profound organic integration, enabling listeners from diverse cultural backgrounds to find resonance in the music. They can experience familiar cultural imprints while appreciating novel artistic expressions, thereby creating new channels for cross-cultural dissemination.

6. Research Conclusions and Implications

6.1. Research Findings

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the cross-cultural game music “Natlan”, clearly outlining its creative concept.

In the melody design, the piece adopts the interval combination of “alternating between steady progression and leap forward”, and also uses the development idea of “repeat-transposition repeat-change repeat”, which builds a tense melody framework and vividly shows the wild vitality of Nata as a “land of fire”.

In terms of rhythm, it fuses the syncopated rhythms of African tribes with the rhythmic patterns of Latin American dance music, creating a unique composite rhythm. The fluid shifts in accents enhance the music's dynamic flow, precisely conveying the primal vitality and passionate essence inherent in Nata culture.

In terms of harmony, this piece transcends traditional functional harmony by employing a variety of chromatic chords that enrich the musical palette, with harmonies progressing with greater freedom and spontaneity. This approach imbues the music with exotic charm and deepens its emotional layers, perfectly aligning with the mysterious and diverse geographical and cultural characteristics of the Nata region.

The success of this musical composition lies in its dual breakthroughs: achieving cross-cultural element integration and aligning with the game's world-building. Rather than merely piling up symbols from different cultures, it meticulously deconstructs traditional musical elements from the Americas and Africa, recombining them while incorporating modern game music techniques. This approach not only preserves the core essence of the original cultures but also closely aligns with the

world's setting of Natlan, making it an exemplary model of cross-cultural game music creation.

6.2. Inspiration for Game Music Creation

The creation of Natlan provides a clear path for the cross-cultural integration of game music.

First, in-depth exploration is fundamental. To create music, creators must thoroughly study the traditional music of their target culture and accurately capture its core elements—such as the syncopated rhythms of African music or the dance rhythms of Latin American music. They cannot simply cobble together various elements haphazardly. Only through this approach can cultural expressions achieve both authenticity and depth.

The second key principle is world-building adaptation. Every design element—melodies, rhythms, and harmonies—must align with the game's atmosphere and cultural essence. Take Natlan as an example: its expansive intervals and dynamic rhythms perfectly capture the fiery, unrestrained spirit of the “Land of Fire,” transforming music from mere background to a vital component that expands and enriches the game's universe.

Thirdly, the fusion of tradition and modernity is pivotal. Creators can employ contemporary arrangement techniques to blend traditional instruments with electronic synthesizers. For instance, combining the resonant beats of African drums and the distinctive timbre of Latin American panpipes with electronic effects not only preserves the essence of traditional culture but also infuses the music with modernity and immersion, delivering a richer auditory experience for players.

6.3. Inspiration for Cross-cultural Music Research

The creation of “Natlan” has introduced innovative perspectives to cross-cultural music studies by blending Eastern and Western musical elements, establishing it as a distinctive case in cross-cultural research. During its development, the work incorporated the distinct rhythmic and melodic characteristics of Western music while preserving the unique cultural depth and emotional expression of Eastern music, ultimately forging a uniquely distinctive style. This approach provides valuable inspiration for re-examining the research content of cross-cultural music from fresh perspectives.

Future cross-cultural music research could adopt the three-dimensional analytical framework of “melody-rhythm-harmony” proposed in this study, integrating quantitative data with qualitative interpretation. This approach would enable deeper exploration of the creative principles behind synthetic music while expanding research perspectives to include cross-cultural works from genres like video game music, film scores, and advertising jingles. Through comparative analysis, researchers could identify patterns of cross-cultural musical integration across different contexts, thereby providing theoretical foundations and practical references for music creation in diverse fields.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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