

Song of the Weekend

By Lee Jackson

From the Lee Jackson Audio Community Discussion Group

(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ljackaudiogroup>)

Entry: 20210424 – Pyroclastic Flow

This week's "Song of the Weekend" is Pyroclastic Flow, from an early version of the 3D Realms game, "Shadow Warrior."

Pyroclastic Flow is a bit of a question mark for me, in that I don't remember if it was used in a published version of "Shadow Warrior." Some evidence exists that it was used in a beta version of the shareware copy, since it appears on YouTube in a video described as a "beta" song. It could have gone out with the full shareware version, since it is in a fully finished EMIDI format (described in an earlier "Song of the Weekend"). I have no recollection in either case.

This week's wordplay quotient is zero. The title is purely descriptive of the song as a whole. Pyroclastic Flow is a brutal song, utilizing no fewer than ten percussion parts, including a pair of taiko drums, panned to the left and to the right of the stereo field. It attempts to musically describe a real-life pyroclastic flow, a volcanic event most famous for the destruction of the city of Pompeii in A.D. 79.

Musical Analysis:

Pyroclastic Flow is in 4/4 time (mostly - more later on that) and runs at 160 bpm. It's not so much in a key as it is based loosely around a Japanese pentatonic scale of sorts, centered around an Eb.

The song begins with a one-measure-long 16th note roll crescendo on tympani. This leads into an 8-bar introduction of rapid-fire "chucked" chords on a distorted guitar, accompanied by a snare drum, toms, and the two taiko drums. A male choir takes over the introduction from the guitar for 16 more bars, singing close interval drones.

A Japanese flute known as a "shakuhachi" plays the main melody for 8 bars after the introduction ends, using the pentatonic scale. It's followed by another Japanese instrument, a stringed one called a "koto," which plays a variation of the melody for 8 bars. Yet another Japanese stringed instrument, this one called a "shamisen," plays another variation for 8 more bars. Finally, all three get together and play their respective 8-bar melodies.

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At this point, the time signature switches to 7/8 for 8 bars. The distorted guitar plays measure-long notes of an Eb-minor ascending scale, while the massed percussion plays brutal rhythmic patterns below. After 8 bars, the time signature switches back to 4/4 for the rest of the piece. The male choir sings its close intervals again, fading out over 8 bars.

This is followed by a long question-and-answer session between a marimba and the koto, which lasts until the end of the piece. The marimba will play a two-bar-long melody consisting of 16th notes, while the koto will answer with a similar two-bar pattern of 8th notes. The patterns ascend in pitch until the very last one, which returns to the original pitch, which sets up the loop in the piece.

This is one of those write-ups that's best read while listening to the piece, so please allow me to offer you a link to a YouTube video of the song. Thank you for reading, and thank you for voting for your "Song of the Weekend!"

Note: the YouTube link included with the original article has gone private, so here is a substitute:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okVfGh-aBds>