

Baking the Wondertart

Release notes



The first phase of Baking the Wondertart was actually the very first thing written for the Cuphead DLC. There were lots of ideas we had that didn't make it into the base game, and I knew that for this game we needed to be very ambitious, to use some concepts which are almost cliché at this point (the use of church organ for example), but to go as epic as possible with them, within stylistic bounds of course. Since this soundtrack had a more lush, Disney'esque palette than the base game, it made sense to try and combine that game's big band sound with the more orchestral approach of the DLC. This piece was heavily inspired by the classic tune 'Dancing Mad' from Final Fantasy VI, written by the great Nobuo Uematsu.

I knew from the first game that I really wanted to do a double big band tune for the last boss, an idea very inspired by the album 'First Time! The Count Meets The Duke', which featured the Count Basie band on one side of the stereo pan and the Duke Ellington band on the other side. I was also inspired by the Silly Symphony cartoon 'Music Land', which is a Romeo and Juliet style love story between a violin from the 'Land of Symphony', and a saxophone from the 'Isle of Jazz'. There is a big battle scene where the two islands lob 'music bombs' at each other, and I thought it would be fun to have our two bands sometimes working together in unison, sometimes lobbing shots back and forth between them, and sometimes even playing in different keys (see Phase 3 Letter B). We attempted this in the first game (One Hell of a Time), but as it was the same musicians playing both passes I don't think the concept worked as well as it could have - the bands ended up sounding very similar. For BtW, StudioMDHR was completely on board to get two separate, full sized big bands involved. The absolute best way to enjoy this track is on a good pair of headphones. This was easily the most complex piece to write in the DLC, at least partially due to the unwieldy size of the score. For visual delineation, we decided it was easiest to lay it out with the rhythm section instruments in the middle, with the band heard in the left channel on the top of the page, and the band heard in the right channel at the bottom. (For a closer look at the recording process, the official behind the scenes video is available to watch on Studio MDHR's official YouTube channel.)

I was unclear in the early development stages the direction that the last boss was going to take (originally I figured it would still be the Devil, because what could possibly be more 'last boss-y' than The Devil?), and so I was originally trying to combine the melodic rhythm motif heard in one of the most well known organ works of all time (Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor) and the Devil's theme. This original riff starts in what is now bar 9 of BtW, and I was just going to fill space with a Bach like diatonic melody until bar 12 where we get a hint of the Devil's motif proper. (You can still hear remnants of this theme in that spot). Once it had been determined that no, the last boss was not in fact going to be the Devil, and since I already liked where the tune was going, I extrapolated what became Saltbaker's motif from the original 'filler' material in bars 9 through 11. This turned out to be pretty fortuitous as it seemed to work as a good theme and starting place all on its own.

(Unrelated to BtW directly, but once we established that Chef Saltbaker was to be the final boss, the 2nd tune written for the DLC is what became the piece known as 'Chef Saltbaker'. I knew I wanted to include some Django Reinhardt inspired manouche music in this game so I took Saltbaker's new theme, wrote it for fiddle, guitars and bass, and 'Chef Saltbaker' the tune was born.)

Another interesting thing about BtW is that, while the tune itself was completed fairly late, a lot of the other themes and leitmotifs from the game were reverse engineered from it. For instance, 'A Far Off Isle' came after BtW, which felt like an easy way to achieve a certain amount of thematic foreshadowing and coherence. I wanted to introduce something completely new towards the end of BtW (Letter J in Phase 3-4), and this of course became a major part of 'A Far Off Isle'.

I knew early on that the final boss music was going to need a huge transition section between the halves, and this was both rhythmically and harmonically inspired by both the end of Mars from Gustav Holst's 'The Planets', as well as the earth shattering moment at rehearsal number 20 of Mahler's 2nd Symphony. Again, this was something that was reverse engineered and simplified into the very first thing heard on the soundtrack, as well as the final section of 'The Key Ingredients'.

We also thought early on about how great it would be to have one moment on the soundtrack where all 117-ish musicians played together, and it made the most sense that would be the glorious final C#Major chord at the end of BtW. Not every instrument is reflected in the score as parts were mostly just handed out at the sessions, but again, this is something that can be seen in a very cool visual in Michael Fisher's behind the scenes video.

My overall conception for the DLC soundtrack was that there would be tunes that relate more to 'lore' and story development (basically the first 5 tracks and last 6 tracks on the official soundtrack), while the individual boss themes would stand on their own, and with a completely separate but self contained series of pieces for the 'King's Leap' levels.

I hope that this brief look at the inspirations and themes in Baking the Wondertart are of interest, and show a bit of my personal process.

Additional notes:

There are actually 3 scores for this piece. We left them separate for simplicity's sake, but also as that is how they were originally created. For ease of reading the scores are presented in concert key.

The empty bars in 59-60 in Phase One and 128-129 in Phase 3 are there just for recording purposes. This allowed 2 bars of pick up into each section, particularly handy for the tempo change between phases 1 and 2.

Phase 1-2 Letter D, I borrowed the shots from 'One Hell of a Time' to tie things together.

I have decided to label the themes throughout BtW chronologically just for the sake of ease, even though, for example, Theme 2 occurs many more times than Theme 1. I have colour coded these on score.

Theme 1 (burgundy)

Rhythmic motif – Heard in 'The Delicious Last Course' in the vocal 'Cup-Head'. Also heard in 'Caute Cave Mortem', 'The Finishing Touch', and 'BtW' singing the Latin lyric 'Ca-Vay'.

Theme 2 (pink)

'Chef Saltbaker' motif and/or chord or scale (for example, the harp glissando over that scale starting in bar 1, while the organ plays a very mushy chord in bar 124 of Phase 3-4) - Heard in 'The Delicious Last Course', 'Chef Saltbaker', 'Caute Cave Mortem', 'The Finishing Touch', 'Triumphant Trio', and 'The Key Ingredients'.

Theme 3 (green)

Inkwell Theme – In some cases this theme is only partially used, but I was still thinking of it nonetheless.

Theme 4 (red)

A short motif, heard triumphantly in 'The Delicious Last Course', 'Triumphant Trio', 'The Key Ingredients', as well as Phase 3 of BtW, but heard ominously in the BtW transitional material.

Theme 'Chef' (Blue)

Secondary theme – A secondary motif used for Chef, heard in 'Chef Saltbaker', 'Baking the Wondertart', and 'Triumphant Trio', 'A Chef's Coda', as well as diegetically in the bakery before the final hallway.

Special thanks to Jamie Hopkings for cleaning up the chart for publication, and all the musicians playing on this track. Extra shout outs to Stephen Boda on organ, Paul Novotny on bass, Drew Jurecka on fiddle, Mark Duggan on vibraphone.



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