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Seiken Densetsu 2 Original Sound Version

Composed by:
Hiroki KikutaArranged by:
N/APublisher:
NTT PublishingCatalog Number:
PSCN-5030CD Info:
1 CD - 44 TracksReleased:
August 25, 1995

Review by: Jormungand

When that soft, deep, celestial breeze begins blowing, chilling yet warm and with the exotic sound of a distant land, the image of a forest captures the mind; a forest of a certain inexplicable beauty, one of soaring, entwining trees, vines interwoven and hanging like the threads of a tattered garment, sparkling brooks and streams diving in and out of grassy hills and flowered knolls like the giant strands of an intricate web; a vision of emerald, graced at its sides with gradients of natural hues and radiances, detailed with the colors of a pure world and framed as a panoramic of impossible intrigue. This is the dizzying artistry of a land of which is the origin of all life, and home to the source of its beautiful existence: the Mana tree.

Even after years of having this dreamlike vision locked into my mind and heart, each time that pure and simple melody begins and flourishes moment by moment into a dazzling explosion of color and life, the breathtaking climax of which I can never escape, I am forced to rely merely on feeling and sensation to reconcile my thoughts of the Seiken Densetsu 2 Original Sound Version. As a soundtrack, it defies the established standard of musical repertoire, shedding the dried-up, conformist aural membrane shamelessly assumed by countless game scores out of sheer lack of creative motivation, hiding away amongst the faceless, innumerable crowd of their clone brethren so as not to attract attention. Indeed, composer Hiroki Kikuta challenged the steadfast rule of tradition, confidently brandishing a daring musical intelligence that braved ground never before traveled by others in his class, clearing a direct path from the sterile confines of the customary norm straight into the heart of the spotlight. No other place would've been suitable for such a fresh, new sound, and it's no wonder Seiken Densetsu 2 is regarded as a legend among legends. This is a score of revolution and liberation, and the debut of one of this media realm's most innovative and accomplished artists.

As previously described at length, "Fear of the Heavens"^[2] is a theme song like no other, sharing in its delicate simplicity a whispered silence telling the story of the world of Mana. Even though the piece does not delve into musical complexity of much depth, Kikuta manages to elude the well-practiced compositional algorithms staining the forefront of hundreds of main themes and introduces the listener to his own fresh new voice. Still yet there are dozens of surprises waiting, such as the low-key harmonic stalking and circular melodic motion of the acoustic guitar-driven "Into the Thick of It"^[2], the breezily carefree bounce and sunny jive of "Distant Thunder"^[2], or the mellow, icy electronica fusion of the elusive "A Bell Is Tolling"^[2]. At peak happiness and light the soundtrack implores the jovial "The Colour of the Summer Sky"^[2] in fits of laughter and cheerful glee; in its dark, shadowy trough broods the prophetic "In the Dead of Night"^[2]. With moments of sincere hope comes the innocent and silvery "Fond Memories"^[2], as the sorrowful "Spirit of the Night"^[2] accompanies tragic scenes and events, its sad and pretty verses evoking heartbreaking emotion. Aside from these very obvious ups and downs, the material scattered in between is what derives the most engrossing musical intrigue; when Kikuta threw out clarity, his deepest insights were allowed to flourish, now surfaced on the wings of creative freedom and leaving in its wake the essence of expression.

Traipsing about a palette of sound, Kikuta indulged his genuine gift of musical architecture, fondly beckoning the artful whims of his soul to guide his hand in the creation of tracks like "What the Forest Taught Me"^[2], an illusory, capricious woodwind venture of frolicking intervals and harmonic accompaniment seemingly committed to paper on impulse after the tall tale of a child's imaginary adventure in the woods. Even then, the chilling, crystalline mantra of "A Wish"^[2] arrives with its feathery poise and weightless motion, inviting you into a gradual, hypnotic embrace while caressing the very fibers of your soul with angel hands. Kikuta's signature inventiveness shines brightly on selections such as the cloudy, trip-hop wandering of "Mystic Invasion"^[2] or its hymnal reprise "Whisper and Mantra"^[2], its subdued incantation a fitting ambience for the ancient Mana temples. Electronic pulses and beats make their way into tracks like "The Little Sprite"^[2] and "Did You See the Ocean"^[2], pairing themselves with genres and styles previously unacquainted with the measured, modernized persuasions of club-induced techno energies.

The archaic canticle "Eternal Recurrence"^[2] is timeless and serene, building to a climax of breathtaking warmth, a song to express the enveloping trance of a wordless prayer to some heavenly divinity. Sudden alarm seizes the listener upon the start of "Danger"^[2], provoking a fiery heating of one's blood and launching their mind into the violent reality of a ferocious melee. Tension and desperation are the essence of this unconventional battle theme, swarming a throng of chaotic musical gestures and phrases every which way until tactfully transitioning to a strong and consistent thematic motive near the song's end. In a dazzling display of stylistic marvel, Kikuta presents the jazzy "A Curious Happening"^[2] and the regal "Monarch on the Shore"^[2] side by side as if they were lost twins, matching brassy seventh chords and a stealthy swing-groove with a grandiose, celebratory processional embellished with concise snare rolls, arcing flute arpeggios and radiant choral lines. On the opposite side of the tonal spectrum is the sinister, otherworldly haunting of "Ceremony"^[2], a macabre invocation of deep resonations and eerie percussive dissonances; certainly a song receptive of Kikuta's more imaginative energies, and without question one of the most unsettling pieces of music present in a game. Our fascinating musician even brings us a piece that to this day confounds any attempt at its replication, the erratic and unpredictable "The Oracle"^[2], formed of little recognizable harmonic content and even less direction; though clear in its form, every other element of the track is nothing but irregular.

Approaching the end of the album is the mesmerizing, blissful grace of "Still of the Night"^[2], solemn and soft, the embodiment of a sacred tranquility found only at the purest earth, under the purest sky. This hushed, sanctified aria is one that seems to have been willed into existence by Kikuta's very spirit, gracing the air with its ethereal contour and silken texture. "The Dark Star"^[2] progresses in a simple but determined ascending line until reaching the stoic, grim countenance of its main body with a heavy snare rhythm and distinct melodic phrase. The novel brilliance of the piece's concluding harmonies are complex and darkly colored, appropriately ending the militaristic cadences with a foreboding calm. Directly following comes a piece which, to me, is Kikuta's most vivid achievement on the album (as well one of the many defining peaks of his career): "Prophecy"^[2], an intricate, prismatic composition of pristine elegant detail and immaculate beauty that seems to have been transcribed into musical notation from the fleeting inspirations of a surreal dream; without doubt, the elaborate musicality of the piece flows directly from some celestial vision, its flowing compound rhythms, multihued harmonic accompaniment and soaring, enchanting flute melody painting stunning imagery of the endless, vibrant skies of some illusory and forgotten world.

As we near the end of album with, the praised work "Meridian Dance"^[2] makes no effort to hide its melodic orientation, leading the final battle into the heartfelt epilogue "Now Flightless Wings"^[2], where the struggles of the story's heroes finally bring an end to the impending destruction they desperately fought. The victorious "The Second Truth from the Left"^[2] is fast and energetic, bringing lively and brisk tones to the ending credits.

And, at the very end of this album is a piece entitled "I Closed My Eyes"^[2]: a simple, innocent, silent lullaby. The Seiken Densetsu 2 score is one of countless original musical concepts, filling your mind and soul with the dizzying height of a monumental tribute to only the finest expressive art; this short, repeating pattern is one to unwind your senses, slowly and delicately reconciling the culmination of a sonic narration of an everlasting legend. Although occupying only a mere half-minute, this track is, regardless, one of the most beautiful pieces of music I've ever heard; its enchantment is in its timeless motion, its perfect form.

It's a rare occurrence that I feel any obligation to devote some words to an album's packaging, but this is simply something I cannot ignore. As life is the theme of the game's content, so too is life the theme of the beautiful artwork. From lush trees to diamond rivers, the forest portrayed here glows of its own magical accord under a starry night sky. Definitely an album that was given the full production treatment.

In coming to the end of this remarkable soundtrack, there's little more that I can say regarding its merits: words are an insufficient medium through which to communicate the value of music, and this inadequacy grows exponentially when confronting art that is exceptionally thoughtful and outstanding. I am unable to describe Seiken Densetsu 2 Original Sound Version to the legendary extent of which it has acquired. So, rather than me trying to explain the meaning, let Hiroki Kikuta tell you instead: the master knows his craft better than anyone, and the fondest experience of this album comes in letting yourself disappear into its embrace. Heed my advice well, and seek to discover that meaning for yourself; and if you do find it, I promise you that it will never leave.

Bottom Line: A+

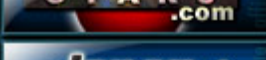
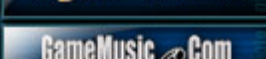
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Music Samples

[1. Angel's Fear \(Title\)](#)[6. Into the Thick of It \(Field Theme 2\)](#)[7. Colour of the Summer Sky \(Joyous Town Theme\)](#)[28. Star of Darkness \(Flight Theme 2\)](#)[35. Still of the Night \(Pure Land\)](#)

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