



Behind The Music

Listen to the soundtrack here:

<https://open.spotify.com/album/6k7ACYxIRT9gCDu1LbNUdl>

Overview

The initial concept of for *The Home County* soundtrack was to an accompanying sound to a relaxed Edwardian setting in a village toward the north of Britain. With themes of unity and working together with the other villagers there couldn't be a better piece of music than Beethoven's Ode to Joy. You will hear hints of this throughout the soundtrack as well as a nod to many other prolific composers that have shaped the background to British orchestral romanticism.

History within the village

There are many areas of *The Home County* village to sonically explore, from the local pub *The Kelpie*, to it's industrial foundation of mining, to the aristocratic Duchess residing over her estate. All have vibrant musical backgrounds within British culture which is celebrated within each area. We have traditional Irish folk music for the pub creating that lively party atmosphere, a cacophony of brass band links to the mines and the matriarch of the village the Duchess is accompanied by her own concerto grosso in the style of the grandfather of western harmony J.S. Bach.

As the mines play such a large feature in the game we have gone further by creating sounds that blend the original orchestra base of the over world with authentic instruments from the Roman, Saxon, and Viking eras for each region of the mines. These start off with a foundation based upon references to Gustav Holst' Moorside Suite in *Underground Adventures* and the Second Suite in F in *Beneath heather and Stone* where Holst uses the famous Greensleeves theme. To blend the eclectic mix of rich orchestral themes from the sunny village into the industry of the era we brought in brass band session musician Lauren Willox to provide a bridging link on the Flugel Horn of the village to the mines below. The third track for the opening to the mines, *Veins of Black Gold*, uses the same rhythmic and textural developmental techniques employed by Karl Jenkins in his *Palladio* and *The Armed man*. This track is an appreciative nod to Wales and Jenkin's link to the modern brass banding movement.

Roman Mines

For this area of the game there are two main tracks, *Mines of the Legionnaire* and *Spirits from Empires Below*, which throw every instrument conveying the tropes of ancient Rome in there... If we had an ancient roman kitchen sink that would have gone into the mix too!

For the Roman mines we were incredibly fortunate to have the Grammy nominated [Dune: Awakening] woodwind specialist Sandro Friedrich to record a number of layered flutes including the pivana, occorso, zurna and the bouzouki. The light and lilting nature of these interwoven lines immediately immerses you to ancient civilizations. Underpinning the flute layers we have lyres and the roman war drums but the instrument that stands out to us is the Cornu. The Cornu, meaning horn, is an ancient roman military brass instrument in the shape of a letter G which wraps around the body. The call of this instrument produces a deep and wide bellow that is iconic of this period whilst also blending with our brass links of the surrounding areas.

Saxon Mines

The Saxons proved a tricky one to get to sit into the mix of the already established sound world of the game. We couldn't go down the route of throwing all tropes of Saxon era like the Roman mines, so elements were chosen resulting in a focus of folk music and their rituals. We chose wooden flutes again alongside the penny whistle and medieval fiddle to provide the folk aspect, in *Saxon Ancestors* and *Under The Barrow Downs*. This coupled with modal inflections was halfway there but a driving force was needed to provide the excitement of battling through the underground labyrinth. A good amount of experimentation with all sorts of instruments was tried and tested until we got to the Hurdy Gurdy at which point we had an introduction to the wonderful Vicki Swan [The Witcher Blood Origin, Runescape Dragonwolds]. Vicki is a world wide driving force of the harpa who opened up a another level of texture and rhythm of sound through the Nyckelharpa; a traditional keyed fiddle that became popular in the medieval era and a perfect fit for what was needed to accompany the folky lilt of the wooden flutes. The harpa worked so well for this setting we decided to explore ensembles of various harpa and ended up combining an ensemble of fiddle, nyckel, octav-harpa with an orchestra to produce a warm and resonant sound heard in *March of the Pickaxe*.

Viking Mines

The final area of the mines was the Viking period and this brought with it some pretty ingrained sonic stereo-types, both from recent blockbuster games and films. So, the challenge here was how to bring these popular tropes into this game to compliment the world we were creating and still keep the game fairly relaxed. Like many creatives faced with a challenge, this is where we avoided the main issue and did other things instead! The other things in this case were to go back to the ancient instrument specialist John Dyer to see what viking-esque instruments he could come up with. There was no disappointment to see a massive pipe with a brass boar's head materialise alongside ram's horns. The incredible carynx proved a worthy distraction! To find a space that would emulate being in a vast cavern was the next port of call so a stone lined church allowed us to maximise the resonance of the carynx to make the haunting calls fit into the chambers of the mines. Combining a few days of playing around with various note bends and calls this alongside other Ram and cow horns set the scene for the nyckelharpa and tagelharpa to give the ever driving rhythmic pulse. When this was combined with the typical viking drum battery the sound sphere was established it just needed connecting to the rest of the mines.

Creating this cohesion was a simple thing of taking elements of the graceful lilting themes written in 3/4 for the overworld and reworking them in 4/4 for the march like beat heard through all of the Viking tracks. The themes are all extrapolated from Ode to Joy via other motifs around the mines; the opening two bars of rising and falling stepwise movement we know so well from Ode to joy can still be vaguely heard in the B theme of *Hammerfall of the Deep*. For the Viking themes this reworking and morphing of themes into something new leaves us with a sense that although in a more rhythmically driven differing style is heard there is still some connection to the surrounding areas.

Hammerfall of the Deep is also a great example of harmonic and rhythmic signalling within the gameplay. Throughout the mines there is a lot of digging, to keep this exciting and dynamic at every turn there is rhythmic pulse that is ever changing in layers whilst maintaining its regular stomping drive in a similar manner to the beat of a typical working-song. As the theme progresses it descends by step in a cyclical pattern giving the player a sense of working to deeper depths whilst completing tasks.

Main Themes

The developer and artists had created a vibrant and lush landscape for the village's setting with a brief of Downton Abbey meets the Lord of the Rings Shire themes. Instantly this put us in the orchestral sphere of scoring and we were able to focus upon the gentle, relaxed, and fun themes that needed to flow throughout each track. We needed themes for each weather type, character and main area that flowed nicely between multiple characters with an overarching sense of unity.

This seemed like a straightforward task but with the game being set in an Edwardian Britain I also wanted to celebrate the music around at the time from the likes of composers such as Elgar, Holst and Vaughan Williams. You can hear nods to these composers in many places such as the opening to *Song Beneath the Sun* where the opening 4 chords quote Elgars Nimrod whilst the violin introduction resembles the introduction of Vaughan Williams' Lark Ascending leading into the spritely 3/4 theme.

Overall the sound world created is quintessentially pastoral with the prevalence of balanced phrases in 3/4 giving a graceful lilt that gives us the sonic warm hug we need for cosy gaming.

Enjoy the Music!

James Smith