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The Soundscape of Alola

Exploring the Use of Hawaiian Musical Tropes and Motifs in the World of Pokémon Sun *and* Moon

ABSTRACT This article explores how *Pokémon Sun* and *Pokémon Moon* use Hawaiian musical tropes and nondiegetic signifiers throughout the games, helping to "situate the player in the game." This identification relies on a combination of player cultural literacy and game musical literacy to contextualize the *Pokémon* region of Alola. The soundscape of the game is made up of the underscore, incorporating traditional instruments from the steel guitar to Ka'eke'eke drums, alongside diegetic sounds to evoke and situate gameplay in a culture and geography most likely foreign to the player. The player's ability to contextualize and situate themselves in this region relies on a combination of their cultural and game musical literacy.

This investigation will also address the consumption of Hawaiian culture both within Japan and in the West, and the portrayal of its traditional music and performance within not only the *Pokémon* franchise but other AAA game titles that have been enjoyed globally. The use of these musical tropes and nondiegetic signifiers simultaneously grounds the player in the region of Alola, whilst constructing a sense of "otherness" in a Hawaiian soundscape designed by composers who are observing and enjoying the culture as tourists and visitors.

The soundscape developed for Alola takes inspiration from traditional Hawaiian culture and music, but it ultimately diverges from these musical traditions and thereby produces a sonic environment unique to the fictional region. Consequently, players develop a literacy built through a return to the sounds traditionally associated with the *Pokémon* game franchise with a new addition of Hawaiian musical tropes to create a region that serves as something of a pastiche of Hawai'i, packaged to be culturally palatable and consumable to nonnative audiences. KEYWORDS Hawaiian Music, Hawai'i, Exoticism, Pokémon, Literacy, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

One could argue that the *Pokémon* franchise is formulaic. The format of the Japanese role-playing-game (or JRPG) franchise, which has become a global phenomenon, has been largely unchanged across the thirty-five games released. Setting out into the world as a ten-to-thirteen-year-old armed with nothing but a Pokémon with which to battle strangers, players eventually come to defeat adult Gym Leaders (the strongest trainers of their communities) and crime bosses. Although, from this summary, the game sounds as if it is steeped in fantasy, there are a multitude of elements clearly inspired by the real world its players inhabit. The franchise has a long-standing tradition of situating its gameplay and narrative within fictional worlds based upon real world locations its players are likely to be (at least somewhat) familiar with. The first four games' regions (Kanto,

Johto, Hoenne, and Sinnoh) are based on regions of Japan (Kantō, Kansai, Kyūshū, and Hokkaido, respectively). The release of *Pokémon Black* and *Pokémon White* (2010) saw a divergence from the use of Japanese landscapes with the Unova region, based on New York City. The following release of *Pokémon Sun* and *Pokémon Moon* (2016) introduced the Alola region, taking inspiration from the islands of Hawai'i.

The Alola region of the franchise borrows its landscape and geography from four of the eight Hawaiian islands, specifically Oahu, Maui, Hawai'i Island (the Big Island), and Kaua'i, with their in-game counterparts being Melemele, Akala, Ula'Ula, and Poni, respectively. Beyond any geographical similarities or comparisons, the *Sun* and *Moon* games draw from a plethora of aspects of Hawaiian culture, going so far as to change the famous formula of the franchise to incorporate chieftain-esque characters (appropriately named *Kahunas*, the Hawaiian word for "expert") in lieu of Gym Leaders. Beyond the surface-level name change, there is evidence of a closer consideration of Hawaiian cultural systems. Historically, each island had its own primary leader, *ali'i nui*, and respective ranking subordinates referred to as *ali'i aimoku*, whose smaller-scale jurisdictions were the districts within each island. The Alola region in *Pokémon* makes use of these Island Kahunas much like the *ali'i nui* and uses further "Trial Captains" for each main district or town for the islands within the game, similar to *ali'i aimoku*. Further allusions to Hawaiian culture are evidenced in linguistic nuances within the games, such as the colloquial term "cousin" being used by NPCs to refer to fellow background characters, an homage to the tendency in Hawai'i to refer to peers and friends as such, regardless of the closeness of real kinship.[1] To a player unfamiliar with Hawai'i, its geography, and cultural nuances, the game presents a landscape and world that evoke a sense of vacation in a foreign land, creating a laid-back virtual world teeming with new life for the player to explore, tour, and inhabit.

Nintendo/Game Freak's choice of Hawai'i as inspiration for these installments within the franchise can be attributed to a long-standing Japanese fascination with and admiration for Hawai'i and Hawaiian cultural imagery, including, of particular significance to this study, its music. In her analysis of the popularity of the ukulele within Japan, Christine Yano states that the "postwar Hawai'i boom built upon various media images that perceived Hawai'i as *yume no shima*—the islands of one's dreams."[2] A widely held Japanese perspective of Hawai'i sees it as the ideal tourist destination due its relative proximity compared to other possible holiday locations, and the paradisical allure surrounding the islands. This is an image cultivated and perpetuated by media depictions of Hawai'i as not only a destination of extreme natural beauty but the attitude of its people being a laid-back one, where life is taken slowly and leisurely, often pictured in front of a backdrop of hibiscus flowers and beaches. This perspective of Hawai'i provides a stark juxtaposition to the everyday life of many Japanese citizens in highly developed cities

1. Douglas Price-Williams, Ormond W. Hammond, Ceel Edgerton, and Michael Walker, "Kinship Concepts among Rural Hawaiian Children," in *Piagetian Psychology*, ed. Pierre Dasen (New York: Gardner, 1977), 301–2.

2. Christine R. Yano, "Plucking Paradise: Hawaiian 'Ukulele Performance in Japan," *Japanese Studies* 35, no. 3 (2015): 317–30.

where people live in extremely close proximity in relatively small housing, often far removed from nature.[3]

Through this admiration and fascination for Hawai'i, a hybrid of Japanese and Hawaiian cultures can be recognized, and will be studied within this article. This hybrid of cultural products will be referred to as *Hawai-Rashii*, a Japanese term to refer to something as Hawaiian-esque;[4] however, this cultural hybrid is not exclusive to Japanese games and media products. This study will first outline and specify Hawaiian musical tropes. It will then discuss how this music can be identified through sonic designators, so that the fusion of Hawai-Rashii music can be better understood and categorized. In order to do this, some space must be dedicated to observing the use of Hawaiian and Polynesian musical motifs within the wider context of video games. Unfortunately, as of yet, the use of these musical tropes within JRPGs is particularly niche, and *Pokémon Sun and Moon* appears to be the most prominent example thus far within released games. However, a number of non-Japanese games do make use of Hawaiian musical archetypes and therefore can also be considered Hawai-Rashii in nature—creating an air of Hawaiian-ness. These will be further explored and analyzed to establish an understanding of how Hawaiian music is presented and packaged in games, before applying it to *Pokémon Sun and Moon*—the primary focus of this case study.

There is a consistent question of authenticity surrounding Hawaiian music as packaged and sold within games (particularly when created and distributed by non-Hawaiians) and the notion of players taking on the role of tourists in any game where they experience Hawaiianness and Hawai-Rashii music. It becomes clear that the final product of what is believed to sound Hawaiian is a fusion of aesthetics to create a cultural "fragrance" (to use Koichi Iwabuchi's term) that is globally appealing to game players.[5] This holds true not only for the specific case study of *Pokémon Sun* and *Moon* but, furthermore, for the wider use of Hawaiian musical tropes within video games, both Japanese and Western. *Pokémon* presents the Alola region as a tourist destination for its players to inhabit; it produces a fictional Hawai'i as constructed through the tourist's gaze,[6] providing players with a soundscape[7] and soundtrack that, whilst drawing on authentic musical traditions and archetypes, is more of an expectation and pastiche of Hawai'i, as opposed to a genuine cultural artifact. Instances of more traditional Hawaiian musical motifs are regularly jettisoned in lieu of those that have long been exported and appreciated globally, such as the ukulele or the lap steel guitar, both of which have

3. Yano, "Plucking Paradise," 317.

4. Yoko Kurokawa, "Yearning for a Distant Music: Consumption of Hawaiian Music and Dance in Japan," (PhD diss. University of Hawaii, 2004), 398.

5. Koichi Iwabuchi, "How Japanese Is Pokémon?," in *Pikachu's Global Adventure*, ed. Joseph Tobin (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 53–79.

6. John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990).

7. The term *soundscape* will be used in this essay to refer to the entirety of sounds that make up the *Sun* and *Moon* games, the primary focus of which will be on the nondiegetic soundtrack and background music that accompany play. The *Pokémon* games often place more importance on the soundtrack and music than any diegetic ambient, speech, or sound effects throughout the majority of the games. These diegetic elements of the soundscape do exist; however, the soundscape also encompasses the music that will be discussed in this essay.

developed into iconic sonic symbols of Hawaiʻi. As such, the music seems designed to appeal to the Western and Japanese touristic sensibilities of game players who are dipping into this rich culture, as opposed to providing an opportunity for players to fully immerse themselves in the history and cultural significance of music from Hawaiʻi.

HAWAIIAN MUSICAL ARCHETYPES

In order to understand the way that *Pokémon Sun* and *Moon* implement Hawaiian musical tropes and signifiers within the game's soundscape, one must identify these tropes and their presence in traditional Hawaiian music. Folk music and traditional forms of chanting are of particular interest to this investigation as these are the musical features most clearly evident in the soundscape of the games, and as such they will be the primary forms of Hawaiian music explored in this article. The native music of Hawaiʻi, particularly folk Hawaiian music, is distinctly steeped in cultural significance, with a great deal of lyrical content relating to nature and notable cultural figures.

A key form of traditional Hawaiian musical performance takes the form of *mele*: an artistic intersection of music, dance, and poetry.[8] The lyrics of *mele* are poetic and make regular references to nature, historical figures, and ancient deities. *Mele* chanting can often be categorized by a lack of instrumentation, making use primarily of the chanter's vocal abilities and minimalist percussion, particularly the *ipu* (a gourd drum), *pahu hula* drum, or *ka'eke'eke* bamboo drum. *Mele* chanting's primary use is storytelling, and in a similar fashion to Celtic bardic singing, it is used to pass down information through the generations. As Leilani Basham notes, traditional Hawaiian song often makes reference to "the *lāhui* (the nation, people), *ea* (life, breath, sovereignty, independence), as well as their connection to *'āina* (land) and that which is *pono* (proper, righteous, and balanced)."[9] "He Mele Inoa O Kalakaua" is an example of *mele* chanting, referring to the historical figures of Queen Liliʻuokalani and Kalakaua, often known as the Merrie Monarch, referencing *lāhui, ea,* and *āina*. The song "Aloha Oe" was composed by Queen Liliʻuokalani, who was well known for her musical works. As with any long-lived song in a folk repertory, artists have performed and rearranged the piece many times, and as such it is difficult to discuss any definitive original arrangement or version, but the motifs and symbolism present within the lyrics are typical of the traditional and folk song corpus. These include references to the land and flora in the line "*Nā pua rose o Maunawili,*" translating to "the sweet rose of Maunawili," providing an example of *'āina* within its lyrics.[10]

Having established some of the key lyrical motifs present within Hawaiian folk music, the piece "He Aloha Moku O Keawe" is a representative example to provide some insight into the vocal styles and instrumental arrangements of Hawaiian folk music. A version of the song performed by the Hawaiian band Nā Palapalai features some of the key designators of Hawaiian music such as the use of falsetto vocals, known as *ka leo ki'eki'e,* and

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8. Barbara B. Smith, "Folk Music in Hawaii," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 11 (1959): 50–51.
9. Leilani Basham, "Mele lāhui: The Importance of Pono in Hawaiian Poetry," *Te Kaharoa* 1 (2008): 152–64.
10. Basham, "Mele lāhui."

the slack key guitar, which makes regular stylistic use of pull-offs and hammer-ons throughout the strumming pattern to add embellishments. Falsetto vocals remain prominent in modern Hawaiian folk music but derive from earlier forms of *mele* chanting. Although this piece contains distinctly Hawaiian stylistic elements, many of these musical features can be traced back to non-Hawaiian origins. Falsetto singing was influenced by Spanish, Portuguese, and Mexican immigrants (also responsible for the development of the ukulele in 1879[11]) in addition to precolonial Hawaiian chants.[12] Furthermore, there is some debate about the origins of the slack key guitar, but it is believed that it arrived with the "first paniolo from Northern Mexico (now Southern Carolina) in 1832."[13] Despite the external influences behind some of the instrumentation in the piece, however, "He Aloha Moku O Keawe" uses distinctly Hawaiian sounds and musical archetypes in its arrangement and as such provides a representative example of Hawaiian folk music. It is difficult to investigate purely Hawaiian musical archetypes without discussing Western influence and the global consumption and adaptation of the music.

HAWAI-RASHII AND THE JAPANESE CONSUMPTION OF HAWAIIAN MUSIC

During the 1980s and 1990s, Hawaiian music and dance saw a great deal of appreciation within Japan, proving an instance of the cultural relationship between the two counties, one which can be traced back to the high population of Japanese within Hawaiʻi in the 1920s, when the demographic made up 43 percent of the Hawaiian population.[14] Historically, Hawaiian music and dance have been exported to a great many nations, as evidenced by the global interest in *hula* and the success of Elvis Presley's musical endeavors that incorporated Hawaiian instruments and lyrics pertaining to the islands. Japan accounts for an estimated 300,000 *hula* dance participants within the country and hundreds of *Hālau hula*, the schools in which *hula* is taught. The wide and contemporary interpretation of *hula* outside Hawaiʻi is that of a lively and melodic performance, whilst *hula* in Japan "began to delve into the older hula traditions, those with drums and rattles—no guitars or ukuleles—and with texts intoned on only a few pitches" around the 1970s.[15] As such, Hawai-Rashii music presents an interesting example of cultural consumption. In his chapter "How Japanese is Pokémon?," Koichi Iwabuchi refers to the ways in which cultural features of a country are associated with a cultural product as its "cultural odor."[16] Conversely, Iwabuchi refers to the palatable and

11. Jim Tranquada and John King, *The Ukulele: A History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2012), 5.

12. Carol E. Robertson, "The Ethnomusicologist as Midwife," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 117–18.

13. Joseph K. Donaghy, "Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar Instruction: Moving forward by Looking Back," *Hulili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being* 8 (2012): 73.

14. Stephen Thernstrom, Ann Orlov, and Oscar Handlin, *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

15. Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "The Beholder's Share: Viewing Music and Dance in a Globalized World (Charles Seeger Lecture Presented at the 51st Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, 2006, Honolulu)," *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 2 (2010): 188.

16. Iwabuchi, "How Japanese Is Pokémon?," 57.

exportable counterpart as "cultural fragrance,"[17] referring to which point the product gives only a globally consumable and alluring sense of its country of origin to add appeal and a sense of otherness. Whilst this terminology originally relates to Japanese cultural exports and artifacts, the same can be applied to how Hawaiian music and dance is perceived and consumed outside its country of origin, with particular relevance to the application within games.

Hawai-Rashii music is not necessarily characterized by Hawaiian music with elements of only Japanese musical tropes, but it is the global phenomenon of homages to Hawaiian music, with certain stylistic elements identified as "more Hawaiian" than others, or those which lack cultural odor in lieu of a cultural fragrance, making them appealing more globally. A notable example of this can be seen in the lead role that the steel guitar plays in Hawai-Rashii music. Kurokawa's study into the topic quotes the late steel guitarist Barney Isaacs as stating that "the Japanese do not consider music without the steel guitar as Hawaiian."[18] The song "Mori No Komichi" composed by Haida Haruhiko in 1940 presents an example of this, where the steel guitar and ukulele are the lead instruments, and was the first Japanese-composed song to feature both falsetto singing and steel guitar.[19] The prominence of the steel guitar within the piece evidences that the instrument is a key signifier of Hawaiianness within music and has been included with such signification in mind. "Mori No Komichi" provides an excellent example of Hawai-Rashii music, demonstrating the cherry-picking of Hawaiian musical archetypes and signifiers to give an air of Hawaiianness, aligning with the idea that the "transculturation of Hawaiian music . . . [has] been a process of selection and rejection" to produce a culturally fragrant piece of music.[20] The allure of Hawaiian music and culture within Japan is not a new phenomenon and can be attributed to a number of factors, primarily a sense of nostalgia and a desire for a laid-back and carefree lifestyle.[21] This is evidenced in the stylistic elements prominent in Hawai-Rashii music, such as the use of acoustic instruments, slow tempos, and strumming patterns to evoke a sense of calm and relaxation, as opposed to the more frantic rhythmic percussion heard within traditional *mele*. This sense of longing for an alternative lifestyle is musically represented through these instrumental choices. The ukulele, despite being an icon of Hawaiian music and regularly brought back as a souvenir from vacations, does not originate from the islands yet has become such a prominent symbol both musically and visually for Hawai'i. The way in which Hawaiian music has been consumed by non-Hawaiian composers and musicians packages Hawai'i as a paradisical destination composed through the lens of tourists and vacationers longingly admiring the appearance of a certain lifestyle, rather than a basis in tradition. It is this laid-back and idyllic lifestyle that Western game players and game-literate individuals will be far more familiar with.

17. Iwabuchi, "How Japanese Is Pokémon?," 57.
18. Kurokawa, "Yearning for a Distant Music," 382.
19. Kurokawa, "Yearning for a Distant Music," 210–46.
20. Kurokawa, "Yearning for a Distant Music," 396.
21. Kurokawa, "Yearning for a Distant Music," 419.

Beyond *Pokémon Sun* and *Moon,* there does exist a small but significant group of games that similarly feature Hawaiian musical tropes and stereotypes to similar ends. The widely popular *Sims 4* presents Hawaiian musical tropes in a very obvious manner. The expansion pack *Island Living* provides players with the opportunity to allow their Sims to pack up normal suburban life and relocate to the fictional world of Sulani. Despite never directly naming Hawaiʻi or Polynesia, the game obviously refers to these real-world locations. A landscape surrounding an active volcano, a clear blue ocean, a town named Ohan'ali, and a preset game family called the Kealoha family (a real Hawaiian name meaning "love") all present somewhat crude allusions to Hawaiʻi. Sonically, the game's soundtrack makes equally obvious usage of culturally fragrant Hawaiian instruments, with regular appearance of marimbas, lap steel guitars, and ukuleles—a trio that has become somewhat of a trend within games and media aiming to elicit a calm and relaxed holiday feel, thus acting as a sonic synonym for the Islands. The player in the game is introduced to Sulani from the perspective of a tourist and is given the opportunity to set their Sims up on an island where life is carefree and laid-back. Despite *The Sims* being a Western game title, the application of Hawaiian musical stereotypes adheres to that which is seen in many elements of Hawai-Rashii music, particularly the cherry-picking of sonic tropes that provide an air of vacation about them, rather than adhering to authenticity.

Sid Meier's Civilization V, another Western game title, contains the character of Kamehameha I, based upon the historical figure of the same name, as the leader of the Polynesians within the additional downloadable content of the game. His role within the game is similar to that of any leader in the franchise: to represent a country, nation, or culture with which the player may interact. There is a musical theme associated with each ruler or leader within *Civilization V*, with two separate orchestrations. These pieces are typically real-world works of music associated with or culturally significant to the nation they represent. One of these arrangements accompanies peaceful negotiations/outcomes, and the other is for hostility and the prospect of war. Kamehameha I's theme is the song "Hole Waimea," a piece written by Leleiohoku II, the brother of Queen Liliʻuokalani. The two variations of the piece within the game feature the same melody yet are orchestrated vastly differently to elicit different responses in the player, and they provide sonic feedback on the state of the player's relationship with the character of Kamehameha I. The peaceful theme makes ample use of a lap steel guitar and ukulele, a slow pace, and relaxing melody. There is also a very subtle use of a choir as the piece progresses, but this is not within the forefront of the song and is a part of the musical backdrop rather than the primary element of the theme. The war theme, however, is in a predominantly minor key and begins with heavy and distorted synth brass and a lap steel guitar sounding akin to a siren. The piece then uses male chanting voices and heavy percussion to suggest a more threatening and aggressive side to the character and the Polynesian people of the game. As the piece progresses, a marimba and ukulele can be heard; however, unlike the peaceful counterpart to "Hole Waimea," these feature more in the background compared

to the minimalist percussion and chanting. Whilst both variations of the piece make use of the same instruments, the peaceful variation adheres to what has been established to be Hawaiian music as consumed outside Hawai'i—Hawai-Rashii music—and the war theme makes use of the more traditional chanting, akin to the *mele* form, and the use of percussion rather than a focus on melody. Like in *The Sims 4 Island Living,* Hawai'i is packaged as a foreign land for players within *Civilization V* and is being observed and interacted with through a Western perspective. The notion of Hawai'i and its culture being one of relaxation and carefree lifestyles is reflected within the peaceful theme for Kamehameha I, and sonically the player is presented with the use of Hawaiian musical archetypes as somewhat of a pastiche rather than a true representation of the musical landscape of the nation. It is interesting, however, that in the instance of Kamehameha I and his Polynesian peoples becoming aggressive, more traditional Hawaiian musical tropes take the forefront. The aforementioned exportable cultural fragrance is reserved for instances of a relaxing vacation—like Hawai'i, musically packaged for players looking into an idyllic and peaceful land from the outside as a tourist.[22] Any instances of aggression—a subversion to the expectations of players and consumers—utilizes *mele* chanting and percussion with minimal melodic elements. *Civilization V* chooses more exportable and culturally palatable musical tropes for a peaceful and idyllic Hawaii, reserving more traditional elements to sonically represent an aggressive and warlike side to the nation.

THE SOUND OF *POKÉMON*

With each release featuring a bespoke new soundtrack, the *Pokémon* franchise has enjoyed global appreciation for its music.[23] The eight titles in the main franchise have led to the design of eight regions for the games to take place in, and thereby eight soundtracks to feature within each region. Before exploring the soundscape of the Alola region, it is important to understand the musical designators and archetypes of *Pokémon* music within the wider context of the franchise. The *Pokémon* franchise is, at its heart, a Japanese role-playing game (JRPG), and whilst there is a general gap in the field of literature that explores the music and sound in the *Pokémon* games, the scholarship on JRPG music can give an indication of how music features in *Pokémon*. Gibbons's work on RPG music categorizes the soundscapes for both Western RPGs and JRPGs,[24] and it explores the "eight melodies template" in JRPGs,[25] with particular reference to

22. Iwabuchi, "How Japanese Is Pokémon?"

23. As an example of how the music has permeated internet culture, the Lavender Town theme has become the center of a short internet horror story ("Lavender Town Syndrome," Creepypasta Wiki, n.d., accessed May 29, 2021, https://creepypasta.fandom.com/wiki/Lavender_Town_Syndrome).

24. William Gibbons, "Music, Genre and Nationality in the Postmillennial Fantasy Role-Playing Game," in *The Routledge Companion to Screen Music and Sound,* ed. Miguel Mera, Ronald Sadoff, and Ben Winters (New York: Routledge, 2017), 418.

25. Patrick Gann, "The Eight Melodies Template: How Sugiyama Shaped RPG Soundtracks," RPG Fan, c. 2018, https://web.archive.org/web/20111016020559/http://rpgfan.com/editorials/2008/11-29.html (accessed April 13, 2022).

Sugiyama's compositions for the *Dragon Quest* franchise (Nintendo/Square Enix). In the early entries of the series, there are eight primary loops within the scores, the first four relating to melodies composed to accompany exploration within the game world: castles, towns, fields, and dungeons.[26] The further four loops relate to situational elements of gameplay as opposed to locational: introductory title screens, endings of the games, combat states and regular battles, and boss/final battles.[27] This particular application of the template refers to the *Dragon Quest* series, but Gann notes that the style Sugiyama established has been adopted by many other composers for JRPGs, particularly regarding how pieces of music are placed in each area of a game, the lengths of the loops, and the moods set by them.[28] The soundscapes of the *Pokémon* franchise follow this template's formula to an extent. Battle music remains fairly consistent throughout an entire game, with some differentiations on the basis of the difficulty of the battle (trainer battle themes are different from those of wild Pokémon encounters), and the music heard within Pokémon centers and Pokémon gyms maintains the same melody throughout all iterations of the games. Unlike *Dragon Quest*, which uses one to two musical themes to accompany all towns, the *Pokémon* score features bespoke themes for each town. Furthermore, the overworld or "field" theme in *Dragon Quest* remains consistent throughout the game, whilst *Pokémon* once again uses unique themes for each Route within the game's overworld. Aside from these differences, however, the eight melodies template fits the franchise's soundscape rather well.

The divergences from the eight melodies template—the town and overworld themes—correspond with the Westernization experienced by the *Pokémon* franchise.[29] Western RPGs often allow their players more explorative agency compared to their Japanese counterparts,[30] in which "the player tends to be free to go anywhere without becoming constricted by the demands of the linear storyline."[31]

Recent *Pokémon* soundtracks can be characterized by their orchestral and majestic-sounding pieces of music. They often make liberal use of snares, strings, and brass instruments—the latter taking the forefront particularly in the third generation of games (*Pokémon Ruby*, *Sapphire*, and *Emerald*), which have become known for their plentiful use of trumpets to such an extent that a fan parody remix of the soundtrack made every instrument a trumpet, with many viewers commenting that it sounded largely unchanged.[32] Some pieces of music in the franchise remain similar throughout the generations, such as the "Pokémon Center Theme" and the "Evolution/Egg Hatching Jingle" that maintain the same melody in all games, with varying instrumentation and level of audio quality depending on the game, the year it came out, and the console for which it was released. A further musical designator of the music of *Pokémon* is

26. Gibbons, "Music, Genre and Nationality," 418.
27. Gibbons, "Music, Genre and Nationality," 418.
28. Gann, "Eight Melodies Template."
29. Iwabuchi, "How Japanese Is Pokémon?"
30. Gibbons, "Music, Genre and Nationality," 421.
31. Winifred Phillips, *A Composer's Guide to Game Music* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 88.
32. Jespoke, "The Entire Pokémon Emerald Soundtrack, but It's All Trumpets," YouTube, May 26, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Vf1G3vUJ5 g (accessed June 1, 2021).

FIGURE 1. I–♭VII–I progression in C major.

a I–♭VII–I chord progression (Figure 1) heard within some of the most recognizable pieces in the franchise, such as the title screen music and the gym music.[33]

The elements of *Pokémon* soundscapes that do not adhere to the eight melodies template are primarily those relating to the explorative and world-building elements of the games, such as the aforementioned bespoke town themes. Furthermore, these typically tend not to adhere to the general designators of *Pokémon* music. For example, there is a lack of trumpets heard within the themes for each town in the third generation of games, despite the prevalence of brass instrumentation in most other location themes in the games. As such, it seems that instances of world-building within the games make a musical departure from the JRPG melody template, allowing for a divergence from traditional composition expected within the *Pokémon* games.

World-building, by definition, allows the game designers to construct a place for players to visit and explore, as such acting as virtual tourists within the worlds built for them. In a franchise where each region is heavily based upon a real-world location, this becomes a significant element of the gameplay. With the global exportation of the franchise, the player pool has grown substantially, and with a more global audience come more global desires and sensibilities—thereby justifying the inclusion of regions beyond Japan. The worlds built within *Pokémon* have begun to draw more and more heavily on their real-world counterparts, and as such, players are afforded the possibility to be "armchair travelers" within the carefully constructed region of Alola, seeing the area as tourists who have just arrived to a foreign and clearly exotic land.[34] The player's character has just moved to Alola, so the player is neither local nor native. It is through their eyes that we, as players, are experiencing the game and, by extension, its setting. Despite the fact that playable Pokémon trainer characters are generally blank slates without much of a discernable personality or many defining characteristics, it is still their experiences of Alola that the player sees and hears: that of a tourist or visitor.

THE SOUNDSCAPE OF ALOLA

The Alola soundscape can be grouped into two distinct categories: music to accompany world-building elements, and music to accompany traditional RPG elements of gameplay. First, I will explore the world-building elements of the games. In a pre-established series such as the *Pokémon* franchise, each new game is adding to what has already been established in the fictitious universe. Alola adds to the *Pokémon* world that contains six

33. Harrison Shimazu, "The Most Important Chord Progression in Pokémon," Splice, November 15, 2019, https://splice.com/blog/Pokémon-most-important-chord-progression/ (accessed May 19, 2021).

34. Christian Krug, "Virtual Tourism: The Consumption of Natural and Digital Environments," in *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer (Amsterdam: Ropodi, 2006), 249–74.

other regions and around seven hundred Pokémon, bringing a new location and new life to exist within that which was pre-established. As explored earlier, the Alola region takes inspiration from the Hawaiian Islands, a highly popular tourist destination, particularly for Japanese tourists, who, in 2019, were the third largest demographic of tourists visiting the state.[35] The world-building relies on the creation of a fictional region that heavily draws inspiration from Hawaiian culture to appropriately evoke a sense of Hawaiianness from the perspective of said tourists. As such, only elements that appeal to players would be relevant for inclusion. This is also the case for the soundscape of the games, wherein the world-building elements of the gameplay are accompanied by an underscore that further adds to the Hawaiianness of the region.

The first piece of music heard when playing the game is called "Welcome to the Alola Region" and opens immediately with chanting in a fake language. This chanting is heard at several points in the piece, and at other points a choir can be heard vocalizing. This piece also makes ample use of percussion throughout. Although the chanting is not in Hawaiian or any identifiable language, it does serve the stylistic purpose of introducing the player to an exotic and foreign *Pokémon* region through chanting and rhythmic percussion akin to what is heard within the *mele* form associated with traditional Hawaiian ritual and dance. The lack of discernible language or words further exacerbates the notion of adhering to a cultural fragrance and removing anything that could be construed as cultural odor. Whilst lacking linguistic authenticity, the music is distinctly Hawai-Rashii and foreign enough to be exotic and intriguing. Yet it is once again designed for those looking from the outside in, and it brings to mind the feeling of being in a new country where you do not understand the native tongue, but the excitement and exoticism of being a tourist or visitor on holiday remains.

A similar instance of *mele* being altered for Western consumption can be seen within the piece "He Mele Inoa O Kalakaua," as it was adapted for use within the widely popular 2002 Disney film *Lilo & Stitch*. A comparison can be made between the original piece composed as a cultural artifact and the version created for a more globalized audience ("He Mele No Lilo"). The original piece "He Mele Inoa O Kalakaua" is minimal in nature, making use of only the voice and percussion. The cultural significance behind this lack of melody and instrumentation can be attributed to how Hawaiian culture places a great deal of importance on the voice and chanting, to such an extent where *mele* can be offered as gifts to loved ones or hosts.[36] Similarly, the *ipu* drum is significant beyond its ability to provide percussion; it has practical uses in the form of carrying food and water and transporting objects and belongings. As such, performing *mele* is, and was, an easy and accessible expression of art, as it can be performed with only the voice and singular percussion. Disney's adapted version, "He Mele No Lilo," takes its lyrics from the original ("He Mele Inoa O Kalakaua") and borrows some from another *mele* titled "Ka Wohi Ku I Ka Moku," which also references the late monarch Queen Lili'uokalani in its lyrics. The

35. Hawai'i Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, Research and Economic Analysis Division, *2002 Annual Visitor Research Report*, Honolulu, 2002.

36. "Oli," Kumukahi, n.d., http://www.kumukahi.org/units/na_kanaka/kaaike/oli (accessed June 8, 2021).

Disney version is far more melodic and orchestrated and, rather than a singular chanter, incorporates a full choir backing provided by the Kamehameha School Children's Choir. The rearrangement maintains authenticity by keeping all lyrics in the original Hawaiian language and using rhythmic leading percussion in the verses of the song. The lead vocalist, Mark Keali'i Ho'omalu, also provides the vocals in the two *mele* examples adapted to make this particular version. A clear difference between the originals and the Disney adaptation, however, is the way in which the lyrics are delivered vocally. The traditional *mele* versions are chants, whereas "He Mele No Lilo" contains vocals that are more melodic and do not immediately evoke a sense of traditional chanting. This can be attributed to the addition of the choir and also the delivery of the lead vocalists' lines, which are sung more than chanted, thereby making it more musically recognizable and palatable to Western audiences. This phenomenon can be seen throughout many further instances of Hawai-Rashii music within *Pokémon Sun* and *Moon* beyond "Welcome to Alola," but it is very clearly evidenced in this particular example. In the Westernization of the *mele*, as in *Lilo & Stitch*, it appears increasingly common for cherry-picking to take place in order to elicit a cultural fragrance rather than odor.

In *Sun* and *Moon,* the piece "Iki Town Island Festival"also makes use of Hawaiian culturally fragrant musical stereotypes, creating a sense of exotic island life through the use of steel pan, distinctive rhythmic percussion, and panpipes.[37] Alola's fictional version of Honolulu, Hau'oli City, features a theme in which the primary melody is almost entirely played on a ukulele—a significant designator of Hawaiianness, confirming that Hawai-Rashii music makes use of such selective instrumentation. These examples highlight the use of Hawaiian musical tropes to accompany world-building gameplay elements. The opening song, "Welcome to the Alola Region," is the first piece players will hear when they begin the game, while they are introduced to the region by a Pokémon expert (Professor Kukui, whose namesake is the Kukui tree, the national tree of Hawai'i) and shown the islands of Alola. The "Iki Island Festival" song takes place during a cutscene in which the player has won their first battle and is congratulated by an Island Kahuna surrounded by trees, bonfires, and what appear to be Hawaiian tiki totems. Lastly, the Hau'oli City music accompanies the exploration within the largest city in the game, which features "symbols of Hawaiian-colonized tourist spots such as towering hotels and beach resorts,"[38] as opposed to the more rural setting of Iki Town. All these pieces of music relate to the purpose of creating a space that is recognizable and familiar to players as a means to localize the gameplay and world in which it is taking place.[39] The music of Hau'oli City, a built-up urban metropolis, reflects a perspective of Hawai'i as a tourist destination, wherein guests are greeted by hula dancers in lei playing ukulele.

37. Panpipes were used a prior Nintendo title to evoke a sense of native-island-ness in the underscore of "Dragon Roost Island" in *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*.

38. Nicholas Reas, "A Pokebalancing Act: The Management of Japanese Cultural 'Odor' in Pokémon" (PhD diss., Illinois State University, 2018), 154.

39. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (London: MIT Press, 2004), 401.

Although still reliant on stereotypical archetypes, Iki Town's festival music presents its listeners with a more rural Alola, both audibly and visually.

RPG elements of gameplay can be categorized by ludic tropes and conventions within the RPG genre such as instances of turn-based battle, leveling up, healing, and overworld travel. These conventions of the genre are evident in JRPGs such as *Dragon Quest*, titles within the *Persona* series, and of course the *Pokémon* franchise. Within *Sun* and *Moon*, these RPG elements take the form of Pokémon battles (with either wild Pokémon or fellow trainers), leveling up a Pokémon, healing one's party in a Pokémon center, and traveling from town to town on Routes, respectively. Musically, the accompanying underscore and nondiegetic sounds for these RPG gameplay elements seem to adhere closer to the traditions of *Pokémon* music, rather than those of the Hawaiian musical tropes. The battle music heard in *Sun* and *Moon* remains consistent with that of other titles in the franchise, beginning with a "startling descending chromatic sequence" upon the initiation of combat.[40] Generic battles (those against wild Pokémon and regular trainers as opposed to Island Kahunas) do not make use of Hawaiian musical archetypes, instead adhering to the startling music known from previous iterations, designed to jolt the player into combative action. Overworld exploration music takes a number of forms, as each Route has its own theme; however, these themes do not make use of any Hawaiian musical tropes; the melody of the Route One theme, for example, is led by a piccolo rather than the ukulele as it has been heard in Hau'oli City's theme.

A significant intersection occurs between Hawaiian musical archetypes and *Pokémon*-centric musical archetypes in the instances of evolution and entering a Pokémon Center. Evolution in *Pokémon* is an indicator of leveling up, and as such it appeals to the RPG elements of the gameplay rather than the world-building. There are two distinct kinds of Pokémon in these titles: Alola native Pokémon and non-Alolan Pokémon. The short musical interlude heard when a non-Alolan Pokémon evolves remains consistent with the style of the evolution music in other games within the franchise, but the Alola native evolution music makes a stylistic departure from the previous example. It still uses a similar structure and rising Shepard tone; the instrumentation, however, is far more reliant on percussion the marimba, an instrument noted for its use to evoke "exotic novelty."[41] Additionally, chanting makes a reappearance and can be heard faintly in the background of the piece, alluding to Hawaiianness by sonic reference to *mele*, but once again in unintelligible language, reminiscent of the opening theme's use of somewhat performative chanting to suggest an air of exoticism. Lastly, the process of healing one's Pokémon involves a trip to the local Pokémon Center, which has traditionally been accompanied by music consistent throughout the franchise, and provides an example of the I–♭VII–I chord progression in its melody. The "Pokémon Center Music" in *Sun* and *Moon*, however, changes the instrumentation of the classic melody and includes a new addition of a short lap steel guitar embellishment as an introduction, something which

40. Shimazu, "Most Important Chord Progression in Pokémon."
41. Matthew Kilby, "A Musical Approach to Marimba Education: Incorporating Global History and Folklore Repertoire" (senior honors diss., University of North Carolina, 2015).

has not been heard in any other iterations of the Pokémon Center theme. This creates a sense of musical otherness compared to the previous regions and stands distinctly separate because of the use of this stereotypically Hawaiian instrument. Furthermore, it is worth remembering that Japanese composers do not consider music to be Hawaiian if it does not include a steel guitar.[42]

Categorizing *Sun* and *Moon*'s music into RPG elements and world-building elements reveals that Hawaiian musical archetypes are only implemented in instances of world-building. RPG gameplay features remain unchanged from their tried and tested musical tropes and conventions. Town themes and narrative-driven cutscenes make use of the ukulele, chanting, and rhythmic percussion in line with stereotypical Hawaiian musical tropes, particularly those which are seen as more Hawaiian by Japanese consumers and composers. Conversely, the battle themes and combat states, for example, adhere to the traditions of *Pokémon* music and maintain the use of startling chromatic descents to encourage the players to ready themselves for action. The overlap between Hawaiian musical tropes and *Pokémon*-centric conventions occurs in the intersection between world-building and RPG elements. Evolution is a signifier of leveling up; however, the evolution of Alola native Pokémon relates to the creatures and life specific and unique to the Alola region and its place within the *Pokémon* universe. The Pokémon Centers are a part of everyday life in all regions in the *Pokémon* universe; these are embedded in the towns and cities of these regions, which are presented as new locations with stories and characters unique to the Alola region. The music accompanying these parts of the gameplay, at which this overlap occurs, is neither Hawaiian-centric nor *Pokémon*-centric; rather, it strikes a balance in between, maintaining melodies that have been featured in various iterations of the franchise, yet rearranging them to include marimbas, chanting, and steel guitars—key designators of Hawaiianness, particularly amongst a team of composers originating from Japan. These instances in the overlap stand out as distinctly Hawai-Rashii in nature, as they include certain embellishments to add a sense of exoticism and Hawaiianness to the gameplay.

CULTURAL AND GAME MUSICAL LITERACY

The term *literacy* originally derives from the ability to read and write and the possession of skills regarding linguistics and communication. The concept has since seen theoretical application in a plethora of fields and can be used to understand the competence and level of understanding of any practice or discipline. In order to analyze the use of culturally significant Hawaiian musical archetypes within the *Sun* and *Moon* games, the literacies explored within this study are cultural literacy and game musical literacy.

Cultural literacy refers to a person's "general understanding of realities and nuances of a culture,"[43] and it furthermore suggest that for a text or piece of media to be understood, then its consumers should share a "cloudy, but on the whole, true sense of the realities

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42. Kurokawa, "Yearning for a Distant Music," 382.
43. Ed Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

that are being referred to."[44] If we take *Pokémon Sun* and *Moon* as the text or media, then the benefits of a player possessing a degree of cultural literacy pertaining to Hawai'i would manifest in their ease of understanding and appreciation of the Hawaiianesque cultural nuances, such as the use of the term *cousin* or the inclusion of Hawaiian words and real-life locations in the game's virtual geography. Cultural literacy can also relate to the understanding of certain musical tropes and archetypes if these tropes are synonymous with the culture in question, such as the association of the ukulele or steel guitar with Hawai'i and Hawaiianness.

Game musical literacy refers to the ability to recognize certain gaming events through an understanding of the composition style accompanying it.[45] A player possessing game musical literacy would be able to obtain certain information from the sounds they hear throughout play—for example, the use of "low dissonant cello motifs"[46] in conjunction with a player's descent into a poorly lit basement or cellar provides them with information by building tension and expectation that something less than pleasant is about to occur. If a cultural literacy can account for the understanding of the Hawaiian musical tropes in *Pokémon Sun* and *Moon*, then a player's game musical literacy provides their ability to recognize and gain information from the *Pokémon*-music archetypes, such as the music heard during evolution indicating that a player's Pokémon is about to change form and level up.

LITERACY OF THE ALOLAN TOURIST

By playing *Pokémon Sun* and *Moon*, players will leave the game having developed a game musical literacy pertinent to the titles. However, a player could not develop a well-informed cultural literacy pertaining to Hawaiian musical traditions and archetypes if the game's soundscape was not intended to be perceived as authentic. The player embarks upon their journey in *Sun* and *Moon* as a visitor and a tourist, and as such, Alola is packaged in such a way to appeal to foreigners whose desire to live and travel there is largely due to the fact that they associate it with being relaxed and laid back. Sonically, this has resulted in musical cherry-picking, wherein authentic elements of Hawaiian music are often overlooked in lieu of the more culturally fragrant motifs and tropes, such as the lap steel guitar featuring in a vast majority of the pieces within the game. As such, the combinative game musical and cultural literacy developed through playing *Pokémon Sun* and *Moon* is one that relies on the "process of selection and rejection" of Hawaiian musical traditions from the composers of the game's soundscape.[47]

44. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy*, 8.

45. Melanie Fritsch, "'It's a-Me, Mario!' Playing with Video Game Music," in *Ludomusicology: Approaches to Video Game Music*, ed. Michiel Kamp, Tim Summers, and Mark Sweeney (Sheffield, England: Equinox, 2016), 32–52.

46. Isabella van Elferen, "Analyzing Game Musical Immersion: The ALI Model," in *Ludomusicology: Approaches to Video Game Music*, ed. Michiel Kamp, Tim Summers, and Mark Sweeney (Sheffield, England: Equinox, 2016), 36.

47. Kurokawa, "Yearning for a Distant Music," 396.

The literacy that is developed does not relate to purely Hawaiian music; rather, it is a literacy pertaining to Hawai-Rashii music—a Hawai'i imagined by Japanese composers and designers, suggesting a Hawaiianesque landscape. Stereotypical instruments such as the ukulele and steel guitar make regular appearances within the soundscape of Alola, but these serve as a means to present the player with a world that resembles Hawai'i as a tourist destination or vacation spot, rather than a nation with a rich culture and history. Both Japanese and Western vacations to Hawai'i are commonplace and sought-after experiences, and this perspective of Hawai'i, that of a holiday-goer, is the Hawai'i presented in Alola, particularly within the music and soundscape accompanying the player's journey in instances of world-building. The few instances of *mele*-style chanting in the underscore provides a sonic metaphor for this—although it is included in the opening song of the games, it is not in any recognizable or legible language. It is instead used on an aesthetic basis, informing the players that they are about to take a vacation in an exotic land.

A review of the game in *Vice* magazine summarizes the *Pokémon* perspective of Hawai'i as a "classic Japanese tour of Hawai'i—an idea so embedded in their culture, like the great American road trip or summer backpacking in Europe, it has its own host of expectations and tropes."[48] These tropes present themselves in the soundscape as the instances of the ukulele, steel guitar, panpipes, and illegible chanting, and they welcome the player to Alola in a somewhat performative manner akin to arriving at Honolulu airport and being presented with a lei. The musical tropes used within the games serve more as an homage to Hawaiian cultural music than a contribution to its corpus, and as such, players are presented with a culturally diluted and fragrant Hawai-Rashii soundscape produced for tourists and by tourists. The result is a literacy born from a combination of traditional Hawaiian musical archetypes, *Pokémon* musical archetypes, and Hawai-Rashii music unique to the Alola region of *Pokémon Sun* and *Moon*, constructed from the perspective of tourists gazing longingly toward an idyllic lifestyle, and arguably overlooking key elements of cultural significance in lieu of those more easy to consume and packaged for non-Hawaiian audiences. ■

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48. Robert Rath, "Pokémon Sun and Moon is a Tourist's Version of Hawaii", Vice, February 9, 2017, accessed May 29, 2021. https://www.vice.com/en/article/ypqany/pokemon-sun-and-moon-is-a-tourists-version-of-hawaii

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