EECS 151/251A FPGA Lab

Lab 3: Simulation, Connecting Modules, and Memories

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1 Before You Start This Lab

Before you proceed with the contents of this lab, we suggest that you look through three documents that will help you better understand some Verilog constructs.

- 1. **fpga_labs_sp18/resources/Verilog/wire_vs_reg.pdf** The differences between wire and reg nets and when to use each of them.
- 2. **fpga_labs_sp18/resources/Verilog/always_at_blocks.pdf** Understanding the differences between the two types of always @ blocks and what they synthesize to.
- 3. fpga_labs_sp18/resources/Verilog/verilog_fsm.pdf An overview of how to create finite state machines in Verilog, specifying their state transitions and machine outputs.

The first couple sections of this lab focus on simulation and it would be valuable to read the first two documents before starting.

1.1 Helpful Hint: Synthesis Warnings and Errors

At various times in this lab, things will just not work on the FPGA or in simulation. To help with debugging, you can run the Synthesis step in your project from within Vivado. Have a look at the Synthesis messages that are generated as result. You can view them from the *Project Summary* window or from within the *Synthesized Design* window. Also remember that you can view all toolchain messages by selecting $Window \rightarrow Messages$. Any synthesis warnings you see here could reveal a possible issue in your circuit. If you don't understand a warning, ask a TA.

2 Lab Overview

In this lab, we will begin by taking your tone_generator design from Lab 2 and simulating it in software. We will learn how to use ModelSim and/or Vivado to view waveforms and debug your circuits. You will then extend your tone_generator to play a configurable frequency square wave and simulate it to check that you have implemented the functionality correctly. You will then construct a module that can pull tones to play from a memory block and send them to your tone_generator.

3 Simulating the tone_generator from Lab 2

3.1 Copying Your Lab 2 Code

Run git pull in your git cloned fpga_labs_sp18directory to fetch the latest skeleton files.

Begin by copying your tone_generator implementation into the lab3/lab3.srcs/sources_1/new/tone_generat file. Don't change the module's port declaration. You can leave the input [23:0] tone_switch_period unused for now.

Let's run some simulations on the tone_generator in software. To do this, we will need to use a Verilog testbench. A Verilog testbench is designed to test a Verilog module by supplying it with the inputs it needs (stimulus signals) and testing whether the outputs of the module match what we expect.

3.2 Overview of Testbench Skeleton

Check the provided testbench skeleton in lab2/tone_generator_testbench.v to see the test written for the tone_generator. Let's go through what every line of this testbench does.

```
`timescale 1ns/1ns
`timescale (simulation step time)/(simulation resolution)
```

The timescale declaration needs to be at the top of every testbench file. It provides information to the circuit simulator about the timing parameters of the simulation.

The first argument to the timescale declaration is the simulation step time. It defines the chunks of discrete time in which the simulation should proceed. In this case, we have defined the simulation step time to be one nanosecond. This means that we can advance the simulation time by as little as 1ns at a time.

The second argument to the timescale declaration is the simulation resolution. In our example it is also 1ns. The resolution allows the simulator to model transient behavior of your circuit in between simulation time steps. For this lab, we aren't modeling any gate delays, so the resolution can equal the step time.

```
`define SECOND 1000000000
`define MS 1000000
// The SAMPLE_PERIOD corresponds to a 44.1 kHz sampling rate
`define SAMPLE_PERIOD 22675.7
```

These are some macros defined for our testbench. They are constant values you can use when writing your testbench to simplify your code and make it obvious what certain numbers mean. For example, SECOND is defined as the number of nanoseconds in one second. The SAMPLE_PERIOD is the sampling period used to sample the square wave output of the tone_generator at a standard 44.1 kHz sample rate.

```
module tone_generator_testbench();
    // Testbench code goes here
endmodule
```

This module is a testbench module. It is not actually synthesized to be placed on an FPGA, but rather it is to be run by a circuit simulator. All your testbench code goes in this module. We will instantiate our DUT (device under test) in this module.

```
reg clock;
reg output_enable;
reg [23:0] tone_to_play;
wire sq_wave;
```

Here are the inputs and outputs of our tone_generator. You will notice that the inputs to the tone_generator are declared as reg type nets and the outputs are declared as wire type nets. This is because we will be driving the inputs in our testbench and we will be monitoring the output.

```
initial clock = 0;
always #(8/2) clock <= ~clock;</pre>
```

This is clock signal generation code. The clock signal needs to be generated in our testbench so it can be fed to the DUT. The initial statement sets the value of the clock net to 0 at the very start of the simulation. The next line toggles the clock signal such that it oscillates at 125 MHz.

```
tone_generator audio_controller (
    .clk(clock),
    .output_enable(output_enable),
    .tone_switch_period(tone_to_play),
    .square_wave_out(sq_wave)
);
```

Now we instantiate the DUT and connect its ports to the nets we have access to in our testbench.

```
initial begin
  output_enable <= 0;
  #(10 * `MS);
  output_enable <= 1;

  tone_to_play <= 24'd37500;
  #(200 * `MS);
  ...
  $finish();
end</pre>
```

Here is the body of our testbench. The initial begin ... end block specifies the 'main()' function for our testbench. It is the execution entry point for our simulator. In the initial block, we can set the inputs that flow into our DUT using non-blocking (<=) or blocking (=) assignments.

We can also order the simulator to advance simulation time using delay statements. A delay

statement takes the form #(delay in time steps);. For instance the statement #(100); would run the simulation for 100ns.

In this case, we set output_enable to 0 at the start of the simulation, then we let the simulation run for 10ms, then we set output_enable to 1. We then change the tone_to_play several times, and give the tone_generator some time to produce the various tones. For now, the tone_to_play signal won't affect your tone_generator which should only be playing a fixed 220 Hz tone.

The final statement is a system function: the **\$finish()** function tells the simulator to halt the simulation.

This piece of code is written in a separate initial begin ... end block. The simulator treats both blocks as separate threads that both start execution at the beginning of the simulation and operate in parallel.

This block of code uses two system functions \$fopen() and \$fwrite(), that allow us to write to a file. The forever begin construct tells the simulator to run the chunk of code inside it continuously until the simulation ends.

In the forever begin block, we sample the square_wave_out output of the tone_generator and save it in a file. We sample this value every `SAMPLE_PERIOD nanoseconds which corresponds to a 44.1 kHz sampling rate. Your tone_generator's output is stored as 1s and 0s in a text file that can be converted to an audio file to hear how your circuit will sound when deployed on the FPGA.

3.3 A Choice of Simulators

As you've realised, the steps in the design and synthesis toolchain are independent programs with agreed interfaces for data flow. When it comes to simulating an HDL description of some design, several commercially available simulation tools exist. In this lab we will consider two:

- 1. **Vivado Design Suite** has an integrated simulator, **xsim**, that can run your Verilog testbench directly. You will have seen in previous labs the *Simulation* category in *Flow Navigator* to the left of the Design Suite application window.
- 2. **ModelSim** is a third-party application by Mentor Graphics. It can also synthesise a simulation of a given Verilog testbench (and its dependent modules), but is a more powerful standalone product.

Both simulators have a lot in common. They both allow you to view the waveforms of various signals in your design as a simulation, which you control, progresses. They're both driven by Tcl

scripts (below), though you can also use a GUI to tweak their behaviour. Their GUIs have similar elements.

To avoid using the Vivado ISE simulator past years' labs have relied on the external ModelSim application, which is also used by the ASIC labs. For our purposes, the newer Vivado Design Suite simulator is actually pretty good. It's also built-in to the free WebPACK version of Vivado, whereas ModelSim requires a second license - a pain if you want to run simulations locally, at home. We will still emphasise ModelSim, however to help give you experience in a sandbox environment. It'll be useful to get a feel for the Vivado integrated simulator too, as a back up should you ever need it. Understanding the features common to both or unique to one should make you more confident approaching unknown tools out in the wild.

We provide a sim directory in the lab3 folder to run the ModelSim simulation from. (Vivado can also be configured to launch ModelSim directly - you can try and set that up if you want.) The next sections will introduce you to ModelSim before comparing it to the Vivado integrated option.

3.4 ModelSim

3.4.1 Using TCL scripts for ModelSim (.do files)

ModelSim takes commands from TCL scripts. Take a look at the lab3/sim/tests/tone_generator_testbench. TCL script. Here is a quick description of what is instructs our simulator to do.

```
start tone_generator_testbench
add wave tone_generator_testbench/*
add wave tone_generator_testbench/audio_controller/*
run 10000ms
```

We begin by issuing the start command to the simulator. This instructs the simulator to scan a list of Verilog source files provided to it to find a module named tone_generator_testbench. This module name must exactly match the module name of your top-level testbench module. The simulator loads and elaborates this module so that its ready to simulate/execute.

The two add_wave commands are important. By default, the simulator will not log the signals in our testbench or DUT as the simulation executes. The add wave tone_generator_testbench/* line tells the simulator to log all signals directly inside in the tone_generator_testbench module. The second line tells the simulator to log the signals in a submodule of the top-level testbench module. Observe that audio_controller is the instance name of the tone_generator instance in the testbench module.

Finally, the run (time) command tells the simulator to jump to the initial begin blocks in the testbench and actually run the simulation. The time value (in our case 10000ms = 10s) gives the simulator an upper bound on the simulation time. The simulator will simulate for 10 seconds before timing out. If the simulator hits the \$finish() function before the 10 second timeout is up, it will stop simulation instantly.

3.4.2 Running ModelSim

With all the details out of the way, let's actually run a simulation. Go to the lab3/sim directory and run make CASES=tests/tone_generator_testbench.do. After a minute or so, the simulation will finish.

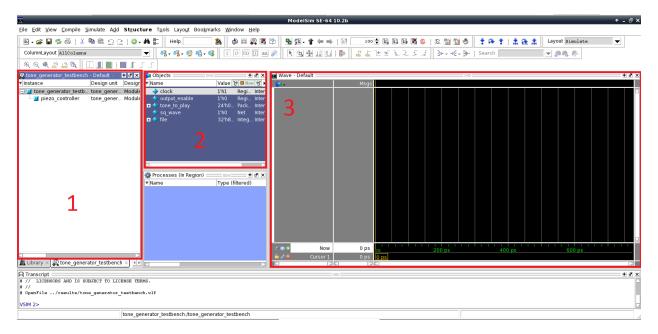
3.4.3 Viewing Waveforms

Let's take a look at the data that the simulator collected. Run the viewwave script like this:

./viewwave results/tone_generator_testbench.wlf &

The results of the simulation and the logged signals are stored in a .wlf file. This command should open that file in the ModelSim Wave Viewer.

You should see a window like this:



Let's go over the basics of ModelSim. The boxed screens are:

- 1. **Module Window** List of the modules involved in the testbench. You can select one of these to have its signals show up in the object window.
- 2. **Object Window** List of all the wires and regs in the selected module. You can add signals to the waveform view by selecting them, right-clicking, and doing Add Wave.
- 3. Waveform Viewer The signals that you add from the object window show up here. You can navigate the waves by searching for specific values or going forward or backward one transition at a time. The x-axis represents time.

You may not see the **Waveform Viewer** when you first open ModelSim. To add signals to view, right click on the signal in the **Object Window**, and click on Add Wave. Add the clock, output_enable, and sq_wave signals to the waveform viewer.

Here are a few useful shortcuts:

- Click on waveform: Sets cursor position
- O: Zoom out of waveform
- I: Zoom into waveform
- F: Fit entire waveform into viewer (zoom full)
- C: Zoom in on cursor position
- Middle Click + Drag Left/Right: Zoom in on waveform section
- Middle Click + Drag to Top Right: Zoom out from current waveform section

You should play with these shortcuts for a few minutes. Now, zoom to fit the entire waveform in your viewer.

You should be able to see the clock oscillate at the frequency specified in the testbench. You should also see the output_enable signal start at 0 and then become 1 after 10 ms. However, you may see that the sq_wave signal is just a red line. What's going on?

3.4.4 Fixing the Undefined clock_counter

Blue lines in ModelSim indicate high-impedance (unconnected) signals. High-impedance is specified in Verilog as the letter z. We won't be using high-impedance signals in our designs, so blue lines in ModelSim indicate something in our testbench isn't wired up properly.

If you have a red line for your clock_counter at the start of your simulation, it may be because the initial value sitting inside the clock_counter register is unknown. It could be anything! Since we don't have an explicit reset signal for our circuit to bring the clock_counter to a defined value, it may be unknown for the entire simulation.

Let's fix this. In the future we will use a reset signal, but for now let's use a simpler technique. In lab2/src/tone_generator.v modify this line as such:

```
// Original code:
reg [x:0] clock_counter;

// Change to:
reg [x:0] clock_counter = 0;
```

This tells the simulator that the initial value for this register should be 0. For this lab, when you add new registers in your tone_generator or any other design module, you should instantiate them to their initial value in the same way. Do not set an initial value for a 'wire' type net; it will cause issues with synthesis, and may cause X's in simulation.

Now run the simulation again.

3.4.5 Helpful Tip: Reloading ModelSim .wlf

When you re-run your simulation and you want to plot the newly generated signals in ModelSim, you don't need to close and reopen ModelSim. Instead click on the 'Reload' button on the top toolbar which is to the right of the 'Save' button.

3.4.6 Listen to Your Square Wave Output

Take a look at the file written by the testbench located at lab3/sim/build/output.txt. It should be a sequence of 1s and 0s that represent the output of your tone_generator sampled at 44.1 kHz. Use a Python script that can take this file and generate a .wav file that you can listen to.

Go to the lab3/ directory and run the command:

python scripts/audio_from_sim.py sim/build/output.txt

This will generate a file called output.wav. Run this command to play it:

play output.wav

If play doesn't work, try running aplay output.wav.

You should hear a 220Hz square wave for 1 second.

3.4.7 Playing with the Testbench

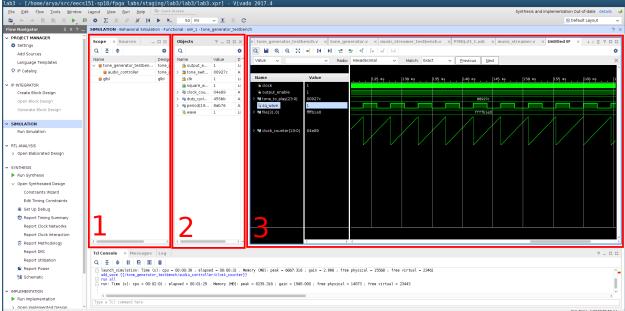
Play around with the testbench by altering the clock frequency, changing when you turn on output_enable and verifying that you get the audio you expect. For checkoff be able to answer the following questions and demonstrate understanding of simulation:

- 1. If you increase the clock frequency from 125 Mhz, would you expect the tone generated by your tone_generator to be of a higher or lower frequency than 220Hz? Why? Show audio evidence of this using simulation.
- 2. Prove that the output_enable input of your tone_generator actually works in simulation.

3.5 Vivado's Integrated Simulator

Inside a Vivado project, expand the Simulation Sources category in your Project Hierarchy window (that's the one with all your files). At any given time only one Verilog module can be the simulation "Top", just as there can only be one synthesis "Top" for implementation. If it isn't already, right-click tone_generator_testbench and select Set As Top. Then in the Flow Navigator window, click Run Simulation in the Simulation category. You will get a context menu: select Run Behavioural Simulation.

Then you will be presented with the Vivado Simulation window:



This should be familiar to you: it looks and behaves like the ModelSim GUI you saw earlier.

- 1. is the **Scope Window**, which is like ModelSim's **Module Window**, and lets you select from among simulated modules;
- 2. is an **Object Window** just like ModelSim's, allowing you to select waveforms to view; and
- 3. is the **Waveform Viewer**.

Play around with it; does your intuition from ModelSim carry over?

Although the Vivado simulator can be controlled with a Tcl script like ModelSim, there is a GUI way to modify settings too. Click Tools menu $\rightarrow Settings$ to bring up the Project Settings dialog. Select the Simulation category in the left pane. (Notice that you can change the default simulator here from Vivado to, say, ModelSim.) The options defined in various tabs in the right hand pane allow you to select various simulation parameters, including initial duration.

A final note: when the Simulation window is open in Vivado, you can use the Tcl Console to execute simulation commands. (The Tcl Console appears just below boxes (1) - (3) in the figure above.) A lot of the commands you can use here will work like they do for ModelSim. The full list of commands is available in the user manual from Xilinx.

3.5.1 Where does Vivado put output.txt?

The Vivado simulator will also have produced an output.txt file with waveform samples. But where? In your project root directory, use find to find out:

```
lab3 $ find . -name "output.txt"
./lab3/lab3.sim/sim_1/behav/xsim/output.txt
```

3.6 Resetting Simulations

Running simulations, both for ModelSim and in Vivado, generates a lot of signal data for the waveforms viewers. You often don't need to keep this intermediary data (which is easily several gigabytes in this lab alone), and you may be running out of quota on the machine you're using. In order to clear intermediate state and reset the simulation, perform the following steps.

- 1. For ModelSim, navigate to the sim directory in which you executed make CASES=, e.g. fpga_labs_sp18/lab3/sim. There, execute make clean.
- 2. For **Vivado**, open the *Tcl Console*. It's usually available toward the bottom-left of the application window, but can also be opened from the menus. In the Tcl Console, execute reset_simulation.

4 Design a Configurable Frequency tone_generator

Let's extend our tone_generator so that it can play different notes. Notice that we have a 24-bit input to the tone_generator called tone_switch_period. Note you will also have to modify your clock_counter to be 24 bits wide.

The tone_switch_period describes how often the square wave output switches from high to low or low to high. For example a tone_switch_period of 284091 (0 d.p.) tells us to invert the square wave output every 142045 clock cycles, which for a 125 Mhz clock translates to a \sim 440 Hz square wave. Here is the derivation:

$$\frac{125 \times 10^6 \text{ cycles}}{1 \text{ second}} \div \frac{440 \text{ periods}}{1 \text{ second}} = \frac{284091 \text{ cycles}}{1 \text{ period}}$$

$$284091 \text{ cycles/period} \rightarrow 142045 \text{ cycles/half-period}$$

You may have to modify the architecture of your tone_generator to accommodate this new input signal. You should reset the internal clock_counter every tone_switch_period cycles and should also invert the square wave output. Remember to initialize any new registers declared in your tone_generator to their desired initial value to prevent unknowns during simulation.

5 Simulating and Debugging Your New tone_generator

Now, run the tone_generator_testbench again. Since implementing the tone_switch_period functionality, changing the tone_to_play register in the testbench should change the tone being outputted by the tone_generator.

Inspect the waveform and debug your tone_generator if you detect any bugs. Then use the same Python script to generate an audio file to listen to your tone_generator's output. You should hear 5 tones, played rapidly one after the other that have descending frequencies.

Create a testbench that plays some simple melody that you define and have its audio output file ready for checkoff.

6 Try the tone_generator on the FPGA

Modify the top-level Verilog module z1top.v to include the new input to the tone_generator. You should tie the tone_switch_period to SWITCHES[0] and BUTTONS[3:0], left-shifted by 9 bits (effectively a multiplication by 512). This will allow you to control the tone_switch_period from 512 to 15872. Leave SWITCHES[1] to control output_enable initially; later, you can use it as an extra bit's worth of input. Here is a code snippet (incomplete):

```
tone_generator audio_controller (
    .output_enable(SWITCHES[1]),
    .tone_switch_period({18'd0, SWITCHES[0], BUTTONS[3:0]} << 9),
);</pre>
```

Is the width of the bus assigned to tone_switch_period correct? Does it matter?

Run the usual synthesis, implementation and programming flow to put your new tone_generator on the FPGA. Verify that toggling the switches and buttons changes the frequency of your tone_generator.

7 Introduction to Inferred Asynchronous ROMs

An asynchronous memory is a memory block that isn't governed by a clock. In this lab, we will use a Python script to generate a ROM block in Verilog.

A ROM is a read-only memory. This data can be accessed by supplying an address to the ROM; after some time, the ROM will output the data stored at that address. A memory block in general can contain as many addresses in which to store data as you desire. Every address should contain the same amount of data (bits). The number of addresses is called the **depth** of the memory, while the number of bits stored per address is called the **width** of the memory.

The synthesizer takes the Verilog you write and converts it into a low-level netlist of the structures are actually used on the FPGA. Our Verilog **describes** the functionality of some digital circuit and the synthesizer **infers** what primitives implement the functional description. In this section, we will examine the Verilog that allows the synthesizer to infer a ROM. This is a minimal example of a ROM in Verilog: (depth of 8 entries/addresses, width of 12 bits)

```
module rom (input [2:0] address, output reg [11:0] data);
  always @(*) begin
  case(address)
   3'd0: data = 12'h000;
```

```
3'd1: data = 12'hFFF;

3'd2: data = 12'hACD;

3'd3: data = 12'h122;

3'd4: data = 12'h347;

3'd5: data = 12'h93A;

3'd6: data = 12'h0AF;

3'd7: data = 12'hC2B;

endcase

end

endmodule
```

To power our tone_generator, we will be using a ROM that is X entries/addresses deep and 24 bits wide. The ROM will contain tones that the tone_generator will play. You can choose the depth of your ROM based on the length of the sequence of tones you want to play.

We've provided you with a few scripts that can generate a ROM from either a file with it's contents or even from sheet music. Run these commands from lab3/.

python scripts/musicxml_parser.py musicxml/Twinkle_Twinkle_Little_Star.mxl music.txt python scripts/rom_generator.py music.txt ../lab3.srcs/sources_1/new/rom.v 1024 24

The first script will parse a MusicXML file and turn it into a list of tone_switch_periods for each of the notes for a piece of sheet music. The second script will take that list and turn it into a ROM that's 1024 entries deep with a width of 24 bits.

Take a look at music.txt and src/rom.v. You can download your own music in MusicXML format from here (https://musescore.org/) and run it through the same parser; it should ideally only have one part to work properly. You can also directly edit the music.txt file to customize the contents of the ROM as you wish.

8 Design of the music_streamer

Open up the music_streamer.v file. This module will contain an instance of the ROM you created earlier and will address the ROM sequentially to play notes. The music_streamer will play each note in the ROM for a predefined amount of time by sending it to the tone_generator.

We will play each note for 1/25th of a second. Calculate what that is in terms of 125Mhz clock cycles.

Instantiate the music_streamer module in z1top.v. Use the instance name streamer to match the expected name in the .do file. Connect its tone output to the tone_switch_period input of the tone_generator. Connect its clk input to the global clock signal. Connect its rom_address output to the LEDSs by routing the top 6 bits of address.

Now let's begin the design of the music_streamer itself. Instantiate your ROM in the music_streamer and connect the ROM's address and data ports to wire or reg nets that you create in your module (you can ignore the last_address port).

Next, write the RTL that will increment the address supplied to the ROM every 1/25th of a second. The data coming out of the ROM should be fed to the tone output. The ROM's address input should go from 0 to the depth of the ROM and should then loop around back to 0. You don't have a reset signal, so define the initial state of any registers in your design for simulation purposes. Also hook up the rom_address output to the ROM address currently being accessed.

9 Simulating the music_streamer

To simulate your music_streamer open up the lab3/src/music_streamer_testbench.v. In contrast to the tone_generator_testbench where the tone_generator was instantiated in isolation, in this testbench we are instantiating our entire top-level design, z1top. This testbench is referred to as a system-level testbench, which tests our entire design using top-level I/O, in contrast to the tone_generator_testbench which is a block-level testbench. This is similar to the difference between unit and integration tests in software development.

You can see that this testbench just runs a simulation for 2 seconds and then exits. You might have to modify the music_streamer_testbench.do file to match the name of your module instances in z1top.v.

To execute the testbench, run make CASES=tests/music_streamer_testbench.do in lab3/sim. This may take several minutes to complete. You may have to run make clean before running make if ModelSim has cached build artifacts.

Inspect your waveform to make sure you get what you expect. Verify that there are no undefined signals (red lines, x) Then run the Python script to generate a .wav file of your simulation results and listen to your music_streamer. It should sound like the first few seconds of the song that was loaded on the ROM.

10 Verify your Code to Works For Rest Notes

In simulation, you can often catch bugs that would be difficult or impossible to catch by running your circuit on the FPGA. You should verify that if your ROM contains an entry that is zero (i.e. generate a 0Hz wave), that the tone_generator holds the square_wave_out output at either 1 or 0 with no oscillation. Verify this in simulation, and prove the correct functionality during checkoff.

11 Try it on the FPGA!

Now try your music_streamer on the FPGA. You should expect the output to be the same as in simulation. The SWITCHES[1] switch should still work to disable the output of the tone_generator. Show your final results, simulation, and the working design on the FPGA to the TA for checkoff.

12 Checkoff

- 1. Section 3.4.7 How will a higher clock frequency impact the frequency of the square wave output for a fixed tone_switch_period?
- 2. Section 5 Play an audio file that was generated using the tone_generator_testbench that plays some melody you define.
- 3. Section 10 Prove that if the ROM contains an entry for a tone_switch_period of 0, that the square wave doesn't oscillate.
- 4. Section 11 Show the working music_streamer on the FPGA.

13 Conclusion

You are done with lab 3! Please write down any and all feedback and criticism of this lab and share it with the TA.